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Where Dorset Meets Devon

"WHERE DORSET MEETS DEVON."

Where Dorset Meets Devon

BY

FRANCIS BICKLEY

ILLUSTRATED BY

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Contents

CHAPTER I

PAGE

THE STORY OF OLD LYME 1

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF OLD LYME (*continued*) 29

CHAPTER III

CHARMOUTH AND WOOTTON FITZPAINE 57

CHAPTER IV

WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM TO CHIDEOCK AND BRIDPORT . . 89

CHAPTER V

UPLYME TO HUNTER'S LODGE, LAMBERT'S CASTLE, MARSHWOOD AND RACEDOWN 113

CHAPTER VI

AXMINSTER, KILMINGTON, AND THE AXE VALLEY 137

CHAPTER VII

AXMINSTER TO MUSBURY, COMBPYNE, THE LANDSLIP AND AXMOUTH 175

CHAPTER VIII

SEATON, BEER AND BRANSCOMBE 207

CHAPTER IX

FORD ABBEY 237

List of Illustrations

	PAGE
"WHERE DORSET MEETS DEVON"	*Frontispiece*
LYME FROM THE COBB	5
AT THE LOWER END OF BROAD STREET	9
A BROAD STREET "BACK"	11
CORNER OF THE PARADE, LYME REGIS	15
AT THE COBB	16
COLWAY LANE	21
COBB LANE	24
GUN CLIFF	33
WINDOWS IN SILVER STREET	37
THE COBB	41
S. MICHAEL'S CHURCH	48
SHERBORNE LANE	50
COOMBE COURT	51
THE LYNCH	52
THE HEAD OF SHERBORNE LANE	53
THE CHAINED BIBLE	56
CHURCH CLIFF	61
THE FOSSIL SHOP	62
CHARMOUTH STREET	63
THE BEACH AT CHARMOUTH.	67
COTTAGE, ONCE THE "QUEEN'S ARMS" INN	71
THE "GEORGE" INN	72
CHARMOUTH. AT THE FOOT OF CHARMOUTH STREET	79
WOOTTON FITZPAINE	83
IN MONKTON WYLD CHURCHYARD	85

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
A COTTAGE INTERIOR	93
WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM	95
WHITCHURCH TOWER	99
WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM	102
CHIDEOCK	106
BEER HEAD AND GOLDEN CAP FROM SEATOWN	108
UPLYME SMITHY	117
IN UPLYME	119
UPLYME	120
HARCOMBE BOTTOM	121
AT RHODE HILL	125
"WHERE ONE ROAD BURROWS UNDER ANOTHER"	126
CONEY'S CASTLE	128
REMAINS OF NORMAN CASTLE, MARSHWOOD VALE	129
BETTISCOMBE HAUNTED HOUSE	131
RACEDOWN FARM	133
THE AXE VALLEY, FROM COLYFORD BRIDGE	141
AT WHITFORD	143
AXMINSTER.	145
AXMINSTER CHURCH	147
MARKET DAY AT AXMINSTER	149
LYME STREET, AXMINSTER	151
IN KILMINGTON	153
SHUTE HILL PANORAMA	159
OLD SHUTE HOUSE	165
THE KITCHEN, OLD SHUTE HOUSE	166
COLCOMBE CASTLE	167
COLYTON	169
COLYFORD	172
AN AXMOUTH CHIMNEY SUNDIAL	174
IN COMBPYNE SMITHY	179
NEWENHAM ABBEY FARM	181
ASHE HOUSE	183
MUSBURY CHURCH	186
THE DRAKE MONUMENT	187

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

LOOKING SEAWARD FROM MUSBURY 189
COMBPYNE CHURCH 193
IN COMBPYNE 195
FARMHOUSE AT COMBPYNE, ONCE A CONVENT 196
AT ROUSDON CHURCH 197
PINHAY BAY 199
BINDON HOUSE 202
POST OFFICE, AXMOUTH 203
IN AXMOUTH STREET 204
AXMOUTH CHURCH 206
SEATON BAY, LOOKING WESTWARD 208
AXMOUTH BRIDGE 211
MOUTH OF THE AXE 212
FORE STREET, SEATON 213
SEATON CHURCH 214
SEATON BAY, LOOKING EASTWARD 215
BEER 219
OLD COTTAGES, BEER 220
BEER HEAD 221
BEACHING FISHER BOATS AT BEER 224
BRANSCOMBE 227
AT BRANSCOMBE 228
BRANSCOMBE CHURCH 230
IN BRANSCOMBE CHURCH 231
THE BEACH, BRANSCOMBE 232
BRANSCOMBE CHURCH KEY 235
HAWKCHURCH 241
BARN, ONCE A CHURCH, AT HOLDITCH 243
THORNCOMBE 244
FORD ABBEY 247
FORD ABBEY 249
FORD ABBEY 253
FORD ABBEY—SHOWING THE MONKS' WALK 255
CIDER MAKING 259

THE STORY OF OLD LYME

Where Dorset meets Devon

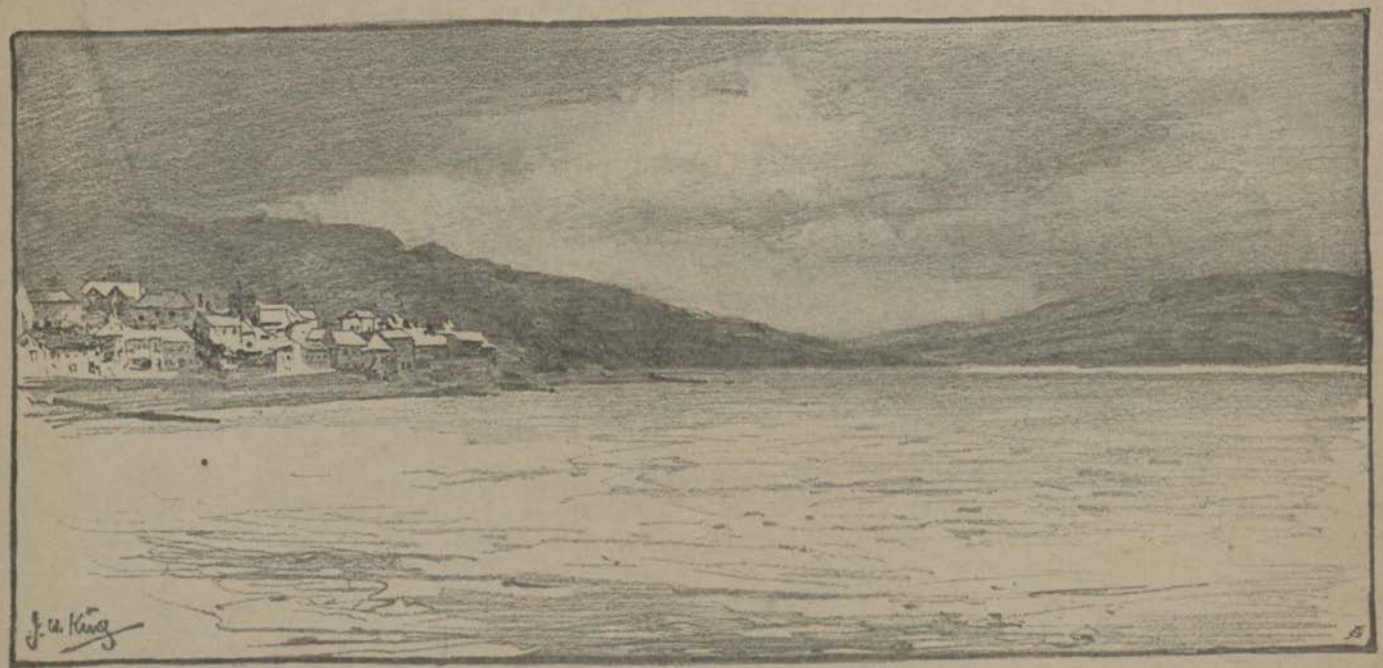
Chapter I

THE STORY OF OLD LYME

IT is a mere truism that one's patriotism has no essential connection with the land of one's birth. Many an Englishman, for example, who is apparently quite callous about the fate of his own country, will yet show himself keen for the welfare of Egypt or Ireland or India. Nor does it suffice to dismiss such a man as a perverted and despicable creature, in whom the springs of right feeling are dry. That is jingo's verdict, but not philosophy's. For, after all, a man is not responsible for his birthplace, and if his instincts, through I know not what far call of the blood, set him on to champion an alien race, what's to be done? You may talk sagely about free-will and predestination, but the instinct remains, irrepressible at the end of it all.

Of course heredity, that modern maid of all work in the explanation of the mysteries of life, must worm its way in here, as into everything else that is written in this knowing young century. But heredity (be it whispered) will not really explain everything; certainly not every case of what may be called altruistic patriotism. Who, for instance, would dream of hinting that a certain well-known poet and landed English gentleman was sprung, though ever so remotely, from the fellaheen? As often as not, I think, the artistic sense will, at least in part, account for this transferred allegiance. One's own place is all round one, vague, incoherent—felt rather as an idea than as a fact; admired in detail, but taken for granted in the gross. Other people's countries, on the other hand, can be viewed objectively, complete, compact and shapely. Details and discords are lost. An artistic and lovable whole remains. That is why he who has sojourned long in foreign lands burns with greatest zeal for his own. He has seen it.

If you are a Londoner, more especially if you were born in one of the less historic suburbs, it is difficult to see how you can be enthusiastic about your birthplace. I, personally, born and bred on the smoke-soiled hem of the great city, have much love for it. But I love it with a purely objective affection, and the London of my predilection is just that London of



LYME FROM THE COBB.

which, during my earliest lustres, I knew nothing. It is the haunt, moreover, of the undesirable alien, and the English tongue is rarely heard in its streets. But there is no single paving-stone on which I feel urged to take my stand and cry, "This is my own, my native land."

Not that I do not know the feeling. I have experienced it in Scotland, on the shore that faces wild Skye, where the jagged peaks of the Cuchullins are as ancient and everlasting music. It has come to me on the high and heathery places of Yorkshire and Devon: an exultation which, if it be not patriotism, is close akin to that fine emotion which throbs in all true patriotic poetry. Heredity, perhaps. I believe there is some stray strain of Scots blood in me, and I bear a Devon name. Possibly then I come, ultimately, of a mountain or moorland stock. Unfortunately my proven pedigree is a short one. I only know that the zest of the moorland moves me as neither lovely valley nor the miracle of the sea can do.

But there is another thing that moves me, with an emotion more tempered and civil, but still warm enough. That is a little old town. Here, at any rate, heredity can make no claim; for it may be Whitby on its northern crag or Salisbury in its southern plain that throws me its personal appeal.

And while all moorland countries are spiritually akin, every town has a soul of its own. So you must take it that my patriotic—I assure you it is patriotic and not patronising—my patriotic feeling about little towns, being so unreasonable, is an artistic emotion.

Indeed, it is obviously so. For listen. London is an epic—very grand and stirring, with great flashes of sheer poetry in its composition; but wearisome, none the less, if taken in too large doses. It demands a sectional appreciation. Poe was quite right about long poems; so was Samuel Butler, who said that if brevity was the soul of wit, it was certainly also the soul of good poetry.

Now your little town, if it be old enough to have traditions and atmosphere, is a ballad. Many ballads are dull and far too long. Many little towns are likewise dull, and far too big. But a good ballad goes vividly from beginning to end. It is like a lyric with a body to it. The countryside (if analogies are not getting strained; but I am sure the poets are with me here) is pure lyric. Superimpose a little town (such as Durer drew) with all the pomp of its past, and you have your ballad.

There are few better ballads in the garnered reliques of the English shires than the little and ancient town of Lyme Regis. Thither, all this weary time, have we been travelling; past Surrey heaths and commons,

through well-timbered Hampshire, across the sweeping chalk of Wiltshire and northern Dorset, until we have reached the land which is still Dorset on the

AT THE LOWER END OF BROAD STREET.

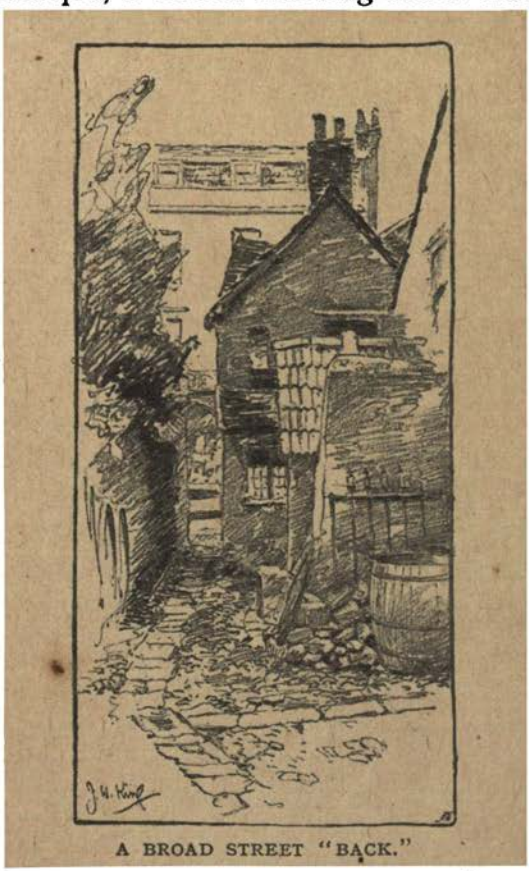
maps, but spiritually Devon. It is the ballad of Lyme Regis which I propose to make; only, being no singer, I shall make it in prose.

To distinguish it from its neighbour Uplyme the Saxons used to call the seaside town East Lyme, and it was also known as Lower Lyme by the Sea;

for Lyme Regis (as it came to be styled) was not always the King's. Most of it was church land before it was royal demesne. In the year of grace 774, the Abbey of Sherborne needing salt for its daily uses, Cynewulf, the west Saxon king, gave the great community a piece of land on the west bank of Lyme river to supply that want. For by salt-making, it seems, the men of the district, in those old days, got their livelihood; and when three centuries later, Domesday Book was compiled for the practical Norman, it was found that there were no less than twenty-six saltmen plying their trade at Lyme. At that date Lyme was divided between three lords, lion among whom was the Abbot of the church of the Blessed Mary at Glastonbury. The other two were William Belet, a thane, and the Bishop of Salisbury, who on the recent transference of the west Saxon see from Sherborne to Old Sarum had apparently taken with him the land of Cynewulf's grant. Later, however, this was put right, and the monks of Sherborne were assured of their lands by no less authority than that of a papal bull. That the Glastonbury acres were well farmed we are assured; for of the beasts that cropped them—five oxen, seven pigs, twenty-six sheep and four goats—the heads may still be counted across nine centuries. Such was the achievement of Arlotta's son.

Then as now, however, land was ever being handed

from one owner to another. A generation after Domesday, for example, a certain Harding son of Ednoth, who



A BROAD STREET "BACK."

plied the trade of lawyer at Bristol but is said to have come of a Viking stock, fought about an estate at Lyme with Abbot Hurlewin of Glastonbury, and, for all his

legal cunning, lost his case. But, in the process of time, all these lesser lords, whether spiritual or temporal, had abandoned their interests in this corner of Dorset, and Lyme had become Lyme Regis, owing fealty to Edward I., that wise ruler.

And, on the third day of April in the twelfth year of his reign, and the twelve hundred and eighty fourth since the Incarnation, Edward, being at Carnarvon, made Lyme a free borough with a gild merchant and all other rights and customs such as were enjoyed by the citizens of London themselves. Municipal charters, except for the few, make wearisome reading. You may see what the men of Lyme got from their generous sovereign in the pages (more learned than these) of Roberts the town's historian, or of Hutchins the county's. But, believe me, Lyme was a blessed and joyous town that April day. Rosy prospects of thriving commerce lay ahead.

Not that the townsmen had been backward in the past. The making of salt had been by no means their only activity, and the charter came as much as reward for former enterprise as an encouragement to new. In the previous reign they were already busy and sufficiently prosperous to bear a share of the charge of the queen's journey into Gascony.

If our ancestors had been less quarrelsome folk, we should know less about them. For records of litigation

are not the least informing of our evidences. The traders of Lyme seem to have had the aggressive spirit of a young and pushing community. They wanted no rivals to their prosperity. Dartmouth, for instance, showed unwelcome activity, and between the men of Lyme and of Dartmouth no love was lost. There were disputes, and worse. It came to fighting on the high sea, "blows, wounds, killings," till at last the king himself had to interfere.

A certain Elias de Rabayne, a man of power, lord of many manors, stands eminent in the history of Lyme at this date. Henry III. had given him a fair and a weekly market, which he was to hold in the town every Monday. He abused the gift. Instead of keeping to his lawful day, he took to holding his market daily and to levying unjust tolls. By this means he spoilt the trade at Bridport market, which was held on Wednesdays and Saturdays and belonged to the king. Such at least was the charge. Elias denied it point blank, and the record of the suit ends abruptly. But he seems to have been a person of shaky principles, for on another occasion he was at odds with his king about some very doubtful business connected with a marriage.

But if Edward's charter did not create Lyme, it undoubtedly rendered it a place of vastly greater importance. The first assize was held there in 1292, when sundry offenders were brought to book. The

mayor himself, amongst others, had been selling wine contrary to the assize. Walter the tailor had stolen three shillingsworth of gold from John the goldsmith. Alice, the brewer's daughter, charged Adam the innkeeper with making free of her person; but it was found that she was not so innocent as she pretended and was put into prison for bringing a false charge, though she was afterwards set free on account of her poverty. Typical examples, these, of the matters with which the King's justices itinerant had to deal. In 1294 Lyme sent her first representatives to Parliament, and three years later (crowning honour) Edward himself was in his new-made borough; though curiously enough no record of the visit remains except the dating of a couple of royal letters.

Thence onward, for three hundred years and more, were the prosperous days of Lyme. The trade in salt (the old commodity), in wool and in wine flourished, and the burgesses waxed rich. It was only fitting that they should incur the penalty of riches. When our kings wanted ships for warring against France, Lyme must do her share; and to the siege of Calais in 1347, four vessels—London herself could furnish but six times as many—sailed away from the Cobb, bearing three score sons of Lyme to fight for their country.

Such expenses were legitimate and proper. Others must be accounted hardships. The sea, by which she

lives, has ever been Lyme's great enemy, and time and again, in the terse records of the middle ages, we find scant but suggestive notes of the ravages wrought in tempestuous weather. Not only the famous Cobb,

whereof more presently, but great parts of the town were destroyed at different times in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and when the sea was quiet the Frenchmen came with fire. About the calamitous end of the third Edward's long reign, our ancient enemy, taking advantage of our weakness to seek vengeance for Creçy and Poitiers, raided the Dorset and Devon coasts. Lyme was among their victims.

As compensation for these losses by fire, storm and pestilence, the burgesses got ease of the heavy rent they owed the king and were no longer asked to provide ships for his service. The effects on their prosperity,

AT THE COBB.

however, were but temporary, and Leland, coming to Lyme about 1535, found it "a praty market town, set in the rootes of a high rokky hille down to the hard shore. This town," he goes on, "hath good shippes, and with fishing and marchauntice. Marchaunts of Morleys in Britaine much haunt this town." And so under the strong rule of the Tudors, when, in spite of

the troubles of the church England grew so lusty, Lyme Regis was not left behind in the march. The new spirit of adventure was at home within her sea-washed walls. A little barque called the *Cherubim* found its way from the Cobb to the far Senegal, and a seaman from the town was one of those who came back to tell the tale of Sir Richard Grenville's immortal fight by the Azores. But the greatest of Lyme's sons at this or perhaps at any age was Sir George Somers, the settler of Virginia and discoverer of the Bermudas, who a year after his death in the Bermudas in 1610 was brought home and buried honourably at Whitchurch Canonicorum.[1]

In that year of glory 1588, Lyme Regis was caught up in the whirl of general excitement; and Burghley and the rest, with their nerves at a stretch to miss no precaution for keeping England from the Spaniard, cast their eyes towards the little Dorset town. Burghley had a plan of the Cobb made, and the following report was sent to headquarters. "Chidioke and Charmouthe are two beaches to lande Boates, but it must be very ffayre wether, and the wind northerly. Lym. A cobbe

[1] Somers had a fellow-townsman and contemporary who, perhaps, deserved as well of his country, though his patriotic services were of a less reputable kind. This was Arthur Gregory, who, as Fuller says, "had the admirable art of forcing the seal of a letter, yet so invisibly, that it still appeared a virgin to the exactest beholder." Sir Francis Walsingham, when member for Lyme, had the luck to discover this genius, and to Gregory's good services Elizabeth's secretary owes something of his reputation for acute and far-sighted statecraft.

or peere, wherein shyppes may aryve, having fayre wynd and bringing the tide with them, and no danger." Sixty men were put in to guard Lyme in case of the landing, which, to the eternal glory of our fleet and the winds of Heaven, was never to take place. But from their walls the townsmen could see the beginning of the battle, in which two ships, the *Jacob* and the *Revenge*, represented the borough's loyalty.

After Tudor security followed Stuart disaster. Having received fresh charters and liberties from the last two rulers of the old dynasty and the first two of the new, Lyme Regis was now to feel the desolation of civil war. This is the great moment of her history, to which all that has gone before has been but by way of introduction. This is the climax, the heroic incident, when Lyme of the King was false to her name and stood firm for Parliament against the assailing hosts of royalty.

The free burgesses would brook no tyranny, and, like most in the west, they hated the Catholics. There was a certain priest, whom adverse weather had kept from leaving England by the date assigned in the King's proclamation. The wind shifting, he went to the Cobb to find a boat, and in his innocence openly told his business. He was taken before the magistrate. Five months he spent in Dorchester gaol; then he was hanged with brutal circumstance and his body quartered

and burnt. Doubtless Liberty, that goddess of strange rites, was freely invoked on this occasion.

That was in 1642, and in the waning of the same year Sir Thomas Trenchard and Sir Walter Earle came to hold Lyme for Parliament. For the town had some strategical import as one of a line across the boot of England. Defence works were at once started and soon needed. By January royalist troops under Sir Ralph Hopton and Lord Poulett were imminent. Parliament was asked for, and granted, men and money.

Quick blows were given and taken in this corner of Dorset. Poulett took the Drakes' house at Ashe. The answer was the capture of Whitchurch Castle from the royalists by Captain Thomas Pyne and his men from the Lyme garrison. Three days later Colonel Ware and a party were surprised and made prisoners, but the gallant Pyne rescued them the same night, capturing colonel for colonel, and sixty men and impedimenta to boot. This Pyne, who commanded the horse of the garrison, was a fine fellow. The taking of Burley House was another of his achievements,[1] and his death in mid siege was a sad loss to Lyme and the cause.

Meanwhile, Prince Maurice was moving westwards,

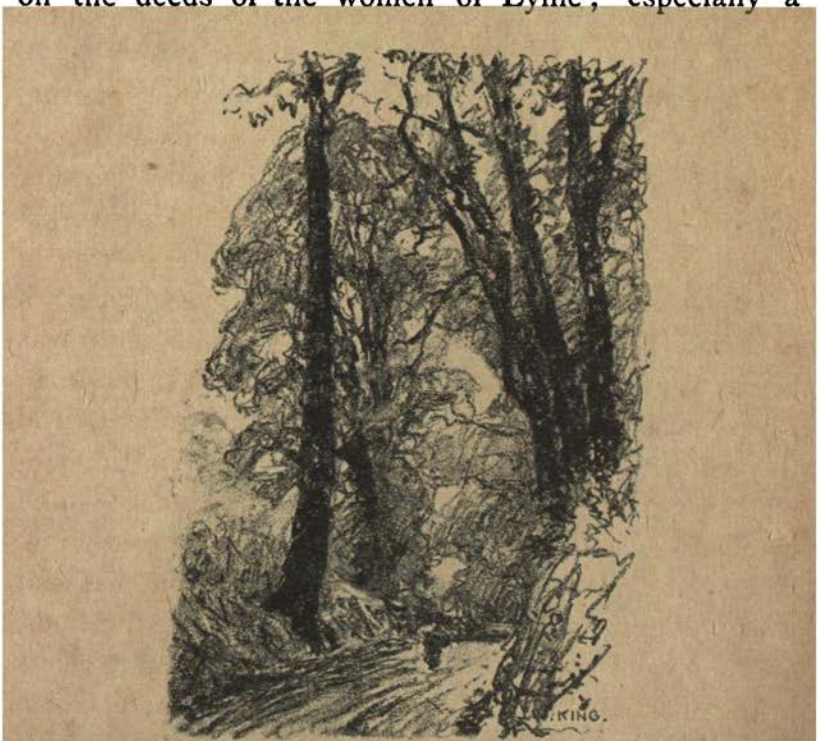
[1] This, however, was perhaps the same exploit as the taking of Whitchurch Castle. For both, apparently, are to be identified with Chideock Castle.

and Parliament thought wise to reprovision Lyme. By April, 1644, he was at Beaminster; and thence, that place being almost destroyed by fire, he moved against the town of my story. Then the spunk of the Lymesters[1] was manifest.

There were only five hundred men in the garrison, while the army outside numbered nine times as many. But there was no talk of surrender, though cavalier officers scornfully called the siege "breakfast work," and looked to dine in comfort. A great man was in the town: Robert Blake, who had done good work at Bristol and would do better at Taunton, and was later to win glorious renown on the high seas. Puritanical preachers fulminated encouragement, and the women rendered more practical aid. In the preparation of the defences they worked as hard as the men, and during the siege their prowess was amazonian. They were not content with hospital or commissariat work. They donned breeches and manned the lines, and one woman is said to have fired off sixteen muskets in the course of an action. Vicars tells the story of a girl who lost a hand in a skirmish. "Truly," said she, "I am glad with all my heart that I had a hand to lose for Jesus Christ, for whose cause I am willing to lose not only my other hand, but my life also." "A sweet

[1] After pages of repression it is out at last. But I will use the word as little as I can.

and most saint-like speech indeed," this seemed to Vicars, and there were many who looked with admiration on the deeds of the women of Lyme; especially a



COLWAY LANE.

certain James Strong, a minister of not very savoury reputation, who most fulsomely praised them in an execrable heroic poem, entitled *Joanereidos, or Feminine Valour.* In the comfortable days after the Restoration, a second edition of this work was published with sundry

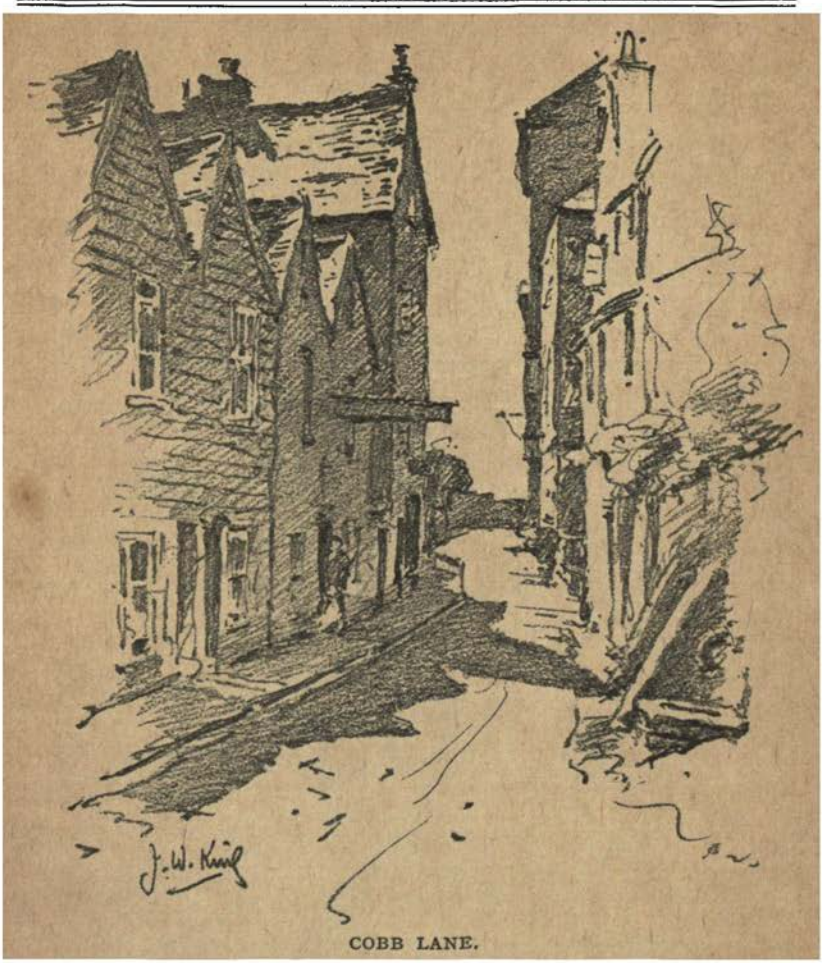
satiric commentaries which reflect more justly on the poem than on its subject. It is to be hoped that the garrison authorities, at any rate, appreciated the assistance they got from their wives and sisters. But misgivings assail one when one reads of sundry whippings administered about this time. Perhaps these breeched amazons sometimes carried themselves more galliardly than commended itself to the dour roundheads.

Maurice's troops were encamped at Uplyme and on the neighbouring hills. The prince himself lay at Haye House, which is gone from the map, while he also put men into Colway manor. The siege began in earnest the 21st April. Fortunately for historians, someone kept a diary, from which many details are to be gleaned. For although a siege may be exciting enough to experience, in description it becomes a monotonous catalogue of guns fired and men moved hither and thither. It is the casual incidents that humanise the thing. One likes to read, for instance, of the pious maid who lost her hand; or of the enemy's storming the town in a fog while the garrison was at supper, crying "Fall on, fall on, the town's ours." But the townsmen called them rogues and drove them back after an hour's hard fighting, killing Colonel Bluet, a fine soldier, and eighty others. It is good to recapture the very words that were spoken nearly three hundred years ago, to hear the "taunting language," the

wounded lying there, crying "Bloody men, bloody men!" One can picture the townsmen's depression when a boy from the enemy's camp stole the colours from the Cobb, and their sorrow over the death of gallant Captain Pyne. The royalists had made a bold night raid on the Cobb and cast wild-fire among the shipping, doing great damage. The garrison made a counter-attack, and it was during this fighting that Pyne got the wounds which, though Lord Warwick sent his own surgeon to attend them, proved fatal. "The loss of the ships," comments the diarist, "was not so much lamented as Capt. Pyne, yielded for dead, for more ships might be had again, but such a man is rarely to be found."

Warwick, the high admiral, had just arrived outside Lyme, and had sent in coals and boots. The hearts of the defenders grew ever higher, and the cavaliers, whose "breakfast work" had already taken them six weeks, began to weary. They made a fierce assault on the 27th May and another two days later; when four hundred of them were slain and the Buddle river ran red.

It seems that Lyme, defended by hastily thrown-up earthworks, was not to be taken by storm. The great danger was fire, which was constantly breaking out here and there. As a precaution the townsmen pulled the thatch from their houses. But, it was whispered,



COBB LANE.

a subtler power than fire-arrows was to be used for the town's undoing. There was a witch in the enemy's camp, who had undertaken to set fire to the stone houses and to sink the ships by her devilish art.

For some reason or other, these threats were never carried out. The end of the siege was at hand. Lyme, hard pressed for all her gallantry, had written urgently to the Committee of Both Kingdoms, and Essex himself was hurrying to the rescue. The cavaliers would not await his coming. On the 14th June they packed their baggage and by two o'clock next morning their camp was empty. The siege had added little to Prince Maurice's reputation.

The liberated garrison held holiday, after the manner of the time. An old Irish woman, left behind by the flying army, was seized on, chivied through the streets, literally hacked to pieces and thrown into the sea; or, as some say, rolled thither in a spiked barrel. Accounts differ as to whether sailors or women were the perpetrators. England's way with Ireland, in either case.

Next day, the 16th June, being Sunday, a service of thanksgiving was held, and for many years the corporation paid for a sermon to be preached on the anniversary of Lyme's merciful deliverance. For three years longer the town was kept garrisoned, and intermittent fighting continued. But in July, 1647, the works were dismantled and the troops dispersed, and in August, 1648, on the petition of the distressed inhabitants, two thousand oaks were assigned by Parliament for the repair of the damage wrought by

fire and by those cannon balls which are still, from time to time, dug out of the sands.

But for Charles II.'s furtative presence in the neighbourhood after Worcester—which is Charmouth's story—Lyme was for the next forty years little concerned with events. Then came the town's second and last great moment: the landing of Monmouth.

The famous independence of the western men, and their hatred of the tyrant at Whitehall, having determined the course of the plotters overseas, it was towards the curved Cobb that Monmouth sailed his ships, when the time seemed ripe for him to strike at his uncle's power. On the 11th June, 1685, the ships, delayed for weeks by sinister winds, hove in sight of the Dorset coast. A Charmouth fisherman, one Samuel Robins, too zealous for gain, hawked his merchandise among them. He had reason later to regret it.

Monmouth chose to land on the sands at the back of the Cobb. The duke must have wet his shoon in getting ashore had not Bagster, a naval lieutenant, Raleigh-like lent his knee. Thanking him with Stuart courtesy, Monmouth asked the young officer to join his cause. But Bagster replied, "No, Sir, I have sworn to be true to my king, and no consideration shall move me from my fidelity." A good answer, though of evil omen for Monmouth.

It was but a small band that joined with James Scott in the brief prayer that he offered up on the grey sands of Lyme that June day. Burnet, wise after the event, thinks that he should have landed by night to conceal his poverty. A few friends joined the blue standard, but the invader's reception was lukewarm. No doubt the rabble of Lyme flocked to the market place to hear the declaration, lurid in its charges against the king, which Ferguson had penned and Monmouth accepted. But it met with no response from men of position. The mayor, Gregory Alford, was already on his way to Exeter, where Albermarle and his forces lay. The rebel duke went first to the *George*, but he was afterwards housed in what is now called Monmouth House in the street which also still bears his name. There, perhaps, he made the little rhyme which the old people were still quoting in Roberts' time.

Lyme, although a little place,
I think it wondrous pretty;
If 'tis my fate to wear the crown
I'll make of it a city.

Gradually from the country round a couple of thousand men trickled in, the youngster Daniel Defoe among them. It was not much of a force wherewith to master England. Nor were they of the soldierly sort. Acts of violence did not help their cause; and

it was at Lyme that Monmouth's greatest misfortune befel. Fletcher of Saltoun, called the only soldier in the duke's band, picked a quarrel with one Dare, a goldsmith of Taunton, about a horse that he coveted. Blows followed, fatally for Dare. But there were Taunton men among the recruits, who clamoured for vengeance, and Monmouth was forced to arrest his lieutenant and send him oversea.

The cause was hopeless from the first. But if Lucy Walters' handsome son was never to wear the crown of England, there was one kingdom of which he was sure. In women's hearts he was crowned. We know how at Taunton the maidens met him with the colours they had woven for him. And as he left Lyme after his four days' sojourn the granddaughters of the gallant ladies of the leaguer scattered flowers in his way. The paths of roses led their hero to Sedgemoor, and over the trampled petals came Kirke and Jeffreys in his stead.

THE STORY OF OLD LYME

Continued.

Chapter II

THE STORY OF OLD LYME (*Continued*).

ON the tragic note of Jeffreys' bloody coming into the west appropriately ends the ballad of Lyme Regis. Twelve persons, sentenced at those dread assizes, suffered death on the Cobb. These, it is true, were not all Lyme men, but the landing-place of Monmouth's election paid its toll with the rest. Townsmen of Lyme were executed at Bridport, at Bath and at Wareham. A number of freemen were disfranchised, and jocular Mrs. Brown, for jestingly telling the exciseman she would pay King Monmouth her excise, underwent public whipping in several market towns. The memory of Jones of the "Great House," who had busied himself with diabolical zeal on Jeffreys' behalf, was long and justly execrated. The stories told of his end bear the stamp of probability. As he lay dead there was a mighty noise and a great light in the air, the gable of his house fell in, and the devil came to carry him away. Shortly after, the master of a ship sailing near Sicily saw a strange craft looming in the sea-haze. He hailed it, but, on a nearer approach, was a little taken

aback to find it manned with devils. "Out of Lyme, bound for Mount Etna, with Jones," was the answer to his inquiries.

Dutch William's landing at Torbay caused some excitement in Lyme. A few troops landed on the Cobb and hurried to Exeter. Then the '15 echoed faintly here. But the days of events, the ballad days, were over, and for the fifty years or so that followed the coming of Monmouth, the town's history is uninspiring.

The early eighteenth century was a bad time for the smaller coast towns. The European wars spoilt their trade, and the joys of sea-bathing had not yet been discovered by society. Lyme Regis suffered with the rest. The population fell lower than a thousand; and they for the most were poor. The great houses of the merchants stood empty, till their decaying masonry was taken for the building of hovels. It was unsafe to walk through the streets in a high wind, because of falling roofs.

A large part of the town was employed in weaving serge, and at almost every door in Broad Street women sat making lace and gossiping, telling stories of King Monmouth, who was fast becoming a hero of legend. Their lace, the Honiton kind, was well known, and Queen Charlotte had a dress of it. But the makers did not grow rich, their town got more and more

GUN CLIFF.

ramshackle, their shops were ill furnished, and a mule (of uncertain temper) was thought sufficient, in dignity and bulk, to carry their London post as far as Axminster. Only the corporation preserved the old tradition and tried to simulate prosperity by spending lavishly. There were costly celebrations when a king was proclaimed or when victory smiled on English or Prussian arms. But this was show. The ill-kept streets were so desolate that a coach and horses were matter for round eyes.

Suddenly all this was changed. The fashionable world fell in love with the sea. Ladies aspired to play the mermaid, and politicians found ozone a panacea for the ills of heavy living. The southern coast towns awoke from their torpor, and the yellow sands became as thronged as the Mall.

The charms of Lyme Regis were soon discovered. Not only was its air balmy and its surroundings such as would appeal to lovers of the picturesque, but it lay within easy distance of Bath. It became the custom to complete the cure begun at the fashionable city by a course of sea baths at Lyme, which has been called a safety-valve to the Queen of Cities.

Under these kindly influences the town soon recovered much of its lost prosperity. New houses were built to lodge the visitors, shops to supply their needs. Broad Street assumed the importance it still maintains, and the western purlieus, now the fashionable side of Lyme,

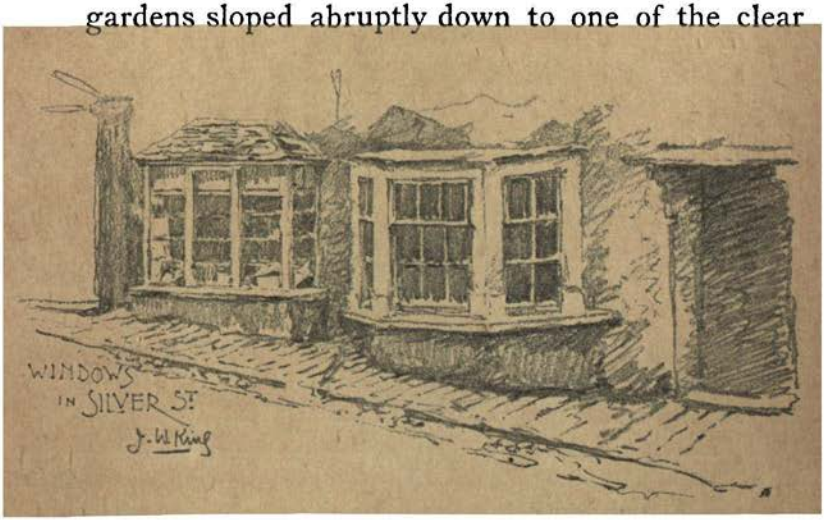
came into being. Poverty fled east of the Buddle. Bathing machines and the Assembly Rooms proclaimed the hour.

Memories of the eighteenth century still exhale from Broad Street. The older parts of the town, Coombe Street, Sherborne Lane and the rest seem dateless. So they must always have been, and so must ever be. The Cobb is the ageless soul of Lyme, ever-renewed after its battles with the sea, like the warriors in Valhalla. But Broad Street, though there is much in it more modern, and picture postcards are to be bought in its shops, seems to have kept the perfume of the ceremonious half century in which first Chatham, then Miss Mitford, then Miss Austen were here. The ghost of the great statesman, dignified in spite of his gout, still makes its way down to the shore, painfully, leaning heavily on the silver-headed stick.

He used to come here with his two elder boys, John, the second and less glorious Earl of Chatham, and William Pitt, destined to a greatness, if not a fascination, the equal of his father's. William's health needed building up and the great war minister, acting probably on the advice of his friend Mr. Hollis, brought him to the warm air of Lyme Regis. The house they stayed in is still the most prominent, although the most retiring, in Broad Street. I was, indeed, shown one a little lower down, to which some tradition of the Pitts' residence has

attached itself. But Mary Mitford was here only twenty years later and states explicitly that the house she occupied was that in which they had stayed. This certainly is none other than the *Retreat*, with its "great extent of frontage," its "large gates surmounted by spread eagles," its "old stone porch" and spacious drawing room. The lovely garden is still there, of which she drew an exquisite picture which calls for full quotation.

> "A little lawn surrounded by choice evergreens, particularly the bay, the cedar, and the arbutus, and terminated by an old-fashioned greenhouse and a filbert-tree walk, from which again three detached gardens sloped abruptly down to one of the clear



> dancing rivulets of that western country, reflecting in its small broken stream a low hedge of myrtle

> and roses. In the steep declivity of the central garden was a grotto, over-arching a cool, sparkling spring, whilst the slopes on either side were carpeted with strawberries and dotted with fruit-trees. One drooping medlar, beneath whose pendant branches I have often hidden, I remember well."

"I have never seen anything like that garden," said Miss Mitford, who knew it at the impressionable time of the passing of her childhood.

In Roberts' day the stone which young William Pitt used for a pound when playing at marbles was still identified. Such juvenile sports must have been the pastime of his earliest visits. At the age of fourteen, when he was already his proud parents' "Philosopher," he was more interested in natural phenomena and speculation. I am not sure that he did not make a poem about the Undercliff. The poet Hayley, Cowper's friend, met him here and was much impressed by his wisdom. He was a great favourite with the ladies of Lyme. So, undoubtedly, was another great statesman, Disraeli the brilliant and fascinating, who was here as a young man and danced at the Assembly Rooms. Chatham, Pitt, Disraeli: Lyme's second flowering time, if less eventful, is hardly less heroic in its associations than the first.

Lyme, indeed, is full of memories. Feet no longer

pulse rhythmically on the polished floor of the Assembly Rooms. Its casements, still opening on the foam, are no longer magic in the starlight for lovers long since dead. But a flutter of skirts, and faint heels tapping, haunt the dusty room. The three violins and the violoncello of the old orchestra make ghostly music. Disraeli, his long length gracefully against the wall, quizzes local beauty. Jane Austen enjoys the dance, and stores in her fruitful memory the humours of the scene.

But this, after all, is not Miss Austen's end of the town. You must go along the sea front, better paved than in Chatham's day, till you get to the little group of cottages which begin Cobb hamlet. Very first of them is Bay Cottage, the house of the Harvilles, where Louisa Musgrove lay recovering from that nasty accident of hers. There is no doubt about the matter. For when Miss Constance Hill, who wrote a pleasant book about Jane Austen's homes, stayed here, the landlady showed her the very room of the convalescence and the children's nursery. The Musgroves and the Harvilles, Anne Eliot and Captain Wentworth were old friends to her. So great are the powers of Persuasion.

The Cobb has been repaired since Louisa's day. Destroyed by a mighty storm in 1824, it was rebuilt in the following years, as a brass plate records, telling with scrupulous exactitude, to a very farthing, the cost

of the work. Here, as long as brass shall endure, stands testimony to the economy of Lieutenant-Colonel Fanshawe of the Royal Engineers, under whose supervision the estimated expense was bettered by nearly £2000.

Lyme Cobb has been costly enough in all conscience. The soul of Lyme, its salvation has been bought with many an offering to the sea-god. "A great and costly jetty," Holinshed called it. Leland did not know what to call it, so left a blank in his book. It is a curious structure, and bears a curious name. Its origin is lost in the mists of the past and what "Cobb" means no one knows, though many have guessed. The Latin, the Greek and the Celtic tongues have all offered their suggestions. I leave it to the philologists, merely noting that the variant Conners is also found, to the further distraction of the learned.

Its history is the history of its disasters. We hear of it first when Edward III. is granting a keyage of one penny in the pound towards its restoration. Once more in the same century it was destroyed, and since then damage has been its constant lot. Generous kings have remitted subsidies, and lowered the rent of the town that the men of Lyme might keep their Cobb a fit harbour for shipping. Henry VIII. granted £20 a year for its upkeep, which Mary, aiming at heresy, took away. Elizabeth renewed the grant, which grew larger

THE COBB.

under later kings; while, from the time of the siege onwards, the occasional sums that have come out of the Treasury run into thousands of pounds. Nowadays repairs are paid for out of the harbour dues.

The pride of Lyme has not always been of its present substance. Of old it was made of great rocks and timber piles, while its shape is an example for evolutionists of gradual adaptation to environment. I could give you details and measurements, but I refrain. They would bore me as much as they would you. Nor is there much to be said about the ancient feast called the Cobb Ale.

And, after all, the Cobb's chief function is to be the monument of Louisa Musgrove. The steps which were the scene of her disaster still remain. To-day they are called "Granny's Teeth," and, unless the allusion is to Red Riding Hood's granny, some impoliteness is implied. You have only to go up them or, worse still, down to realise how rash was Louisa and how blameworthy Wentworth. Of course, as a sacred rite, though with regretful gaze at the well-cut modern flights, one undertakes the perilous adventure whenever one wants to get from one walk of the Cobb to the other. But to jump them! The idea is horrible.

I suppose the best-known story about Lyme is that of Tennyson, who, after tramping over the hills from Bridport, would take neither bite nor sup until he had

seen the sacred spot. "Now take me to the Cobb and show me the steps from which Louisa fell." Then, like King Arthur, after he had witnessed a miracle on the day of Pentecost, he sat him down contentedly to dine. An addition to the story, though not of such authority, is that the great poet utterly and scornfully refused to be shown the place of Monmouth's landing.

Tennyson came to Lyme to stay with Sir Francis Palgrave. Long a lover of the place, and a frequent visitor towards the end of his life, the editor of the *Golden Treasury* made it his habit to spend the summer months here. He even bought a house, Little Park, a charming place, all thatch and gables and odd corners. From the outside you would say that, within, it was one of the houses in which no room is quite on a level with its neighbour. "A pretty little old place," Palgrave himself called it, "with its many little rooms and pretty garden and lovely views." It is not surprising if the months he spent here were as happy and peaceful as he wished them to be. He published a little book of verse called the *Lyme Garland*, the contents of which—especially one poem—won Cardinal Newman's praise. But they are not among the immortal things of English poetry. They were written in aid of a local charity.

As Monmouth said, Lyme is a little place. But one never seems at the end of the big names which, for one reason or another, it brings to mind. Somers of the

Bermudas, Coram, founder of the Foundling Hospital, who was born here in the year of the Revolution, are the two who stand out amongst the natives. Of the casuals (as one may say), there was Monmouth himself, not a great man, but more significant than many giants. Great in the absolute, however, was Robert Blake, the stout adversary of Van Tromp and De Ruyter; who has, moreover, earned the eternal gratitude of English patriotic poets by bearing a name which rhymes so neatly with that of another of our mighty sea-kings. Great also were Chatham and Pitt and Disraeli. Great was the authoress of *Pride and Prejudice*, and great among poets, whatever some modern critics may say, was her admirer. War and politics, literature, both prose and verse, are thus represented in the Lyme gallery by examples that could scarce be bettered. Painting waited long for a worthy representative. In the autumn of 1895, he came, one fit to be placed on the line with the rest. In the autumn of 1895 came Whistler, to seek and to find stuff for his wonderful art. He stayed at the *Lion*, whose landlord he portrayed. He painted a beautiful picture of a little girl, *The Little Rose of Lyme Regis*, and he commenced his only large landscape here. But the centre of his energies was the smithy, which still crashes and blazes just above the *Retreat*. On this theme he executed an exquisite series of lithographs, and he painted a virile

portrait of the *Master Smith of Lyme Regis.* The Master Smith is still there; older, perhaps, and greater in girth, but a splendid man, as he wrestles with the ardent iron. . . . He thought Whistler "a funny old chap" and liked him "none too well." "He was a bit too fidgety for me," he said. I should like to say—only, apart from the unimportant fact that it is not true, I rather suspect it has been said already—that no artist is a hero to his model. Evidently Whistler, a hero to so many, was none to the Master Smith, though I believe he made substantial amends for his fidgeting. Anyway, he immortalised the man.

All these memories of those whose connexion with Lyme has been so transient, have lured me away from the town itself. But what would the world be without people? Even Lyme Regis could not live by fossils alone. Certainly, you say, man is the salt of the earth; but are there no live people in Lyme of whom you can tell us? Live people, I reply, *live* people, except those who live for us with an intimacy of which no one speaks, are shadows that pass by or masks that we scrutinise in vain. It is the dead who live.

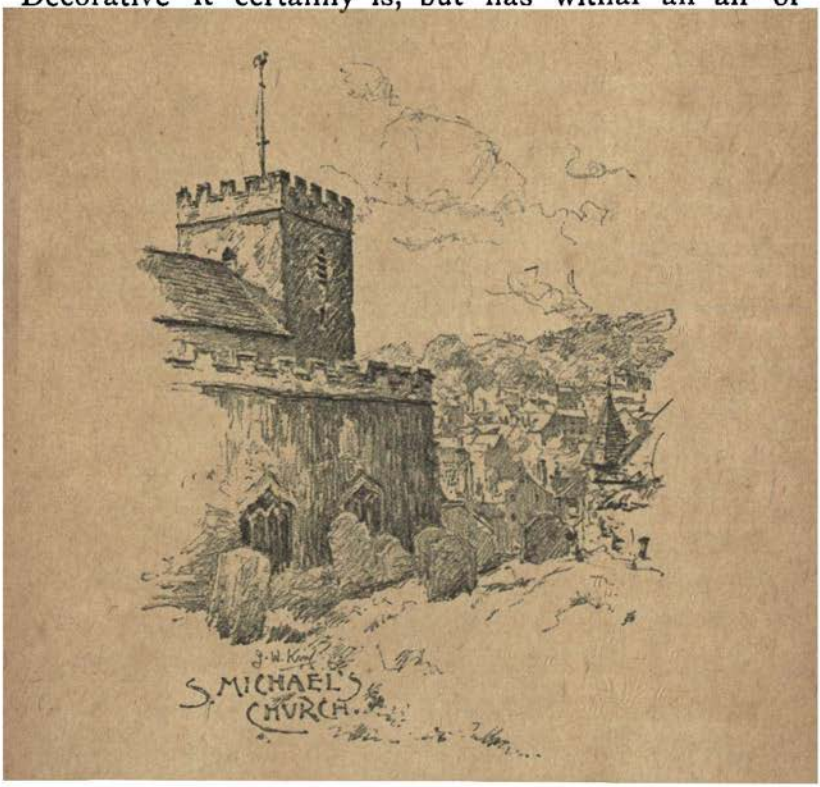
But this is impertinence! By all means let us examine Lyme.

What first struck me was the number of its public, or semi-public, buildings. The wants of everyone, religious, political and social, seem to have been

considered. I thought I had come to a town which consisted of nothing but halls and chapels and clubs. Presently, however, private houses began to dawn on me, and later I learned (with furtive relief) that the club had been closed and that the museum had never been opened.

Chief, of course, among these public places, and the only one, as the guide books say, that need detain us, is the church, dedicated to St. Michael, as a church standing on a hill should be. It is a large church and must once have been larger; what is now the western tower having been the centre of the structure. Built at the end of the thirteenth century, it had to be rebuilt in the fifteenth, and there has been much later restoration. The outside is made ugly by a covering of plaster, and inside there is little that interests by reason of its age: a chained Bible, a Jacobean pulpit, some remains of late Norman or transition columns, discovered a few years ago. There is a window put up by the grateful members of the Geological Society in memory of Mary Anning, the interest of which is associated rather than direct. Doubtless those with a more ecclesiological mind than mine would discover much else. For me, by far the most attractive thing in the church was the tapestry in the gallery, representing the marriage of Henry VII., one of the few pieces of English work of its age. It is a

charming piece of needlecraft, and probably the gentle fading of the colours has taken nothing from its charm. Decorative it certainly is, but has withal an air of



realism. Every figure is individual, and it looks as if portraiture had been attempted. The king's face shows the seriousness and hardness, the lack of romance, which were to make a clean sweep of feudalism and the shards of chivalry and inaugurate the age of Tudor

materialism. Elizabeth Plantagenet, for all her bravery of ermine and gold, shrinks timidly from the proferred ring. The officiating bishop feels the weight of the moment. Behind the queen stands a little but upright lady, looking very determined and efficient. This must be the king's mother, the great Countess of Richmond. The lords and ladies who stand round, bored or interested, are all alive.

It is a pleasant scene, to which the churchyard outside is a contrast. For here, in the picture, stand for ever prosperity and pomp and the promise of a new line of kings. Outside is not only death, but the impermanence of death. The churchyard is gradually crumbling and falling into the sea, than which few sights can be more dreary.

So we leave it without conning the tombs for names of note or for quaint epitaphs, and come out into Church Street.

It is difficult to say what of Lyme has most attraction: the more modern part, which is never so modern as to be without memories and suggestions, or the older quarter east of Buddle, which to me is far less suggestive because far more literal. It is the difference between impressionism and realism. In Broad Street you feel that what you take for a grocer's shop is really the shrine of some fragrant eighteenth century memory. In Coombe Street a shop is a shop, a cottage a cottage, quite literally. You must take it or leave it at that.

If you are wise, however, you will take it. For old Lyme is a pleasant place. It is a place where people live and do not worry about modern problems.

Its inhabitants are men and women and children. Especially children. Certainly old Lyme does not trouble about the regulation of the birth rate or the problems of crowded areas. At the happy hour when the schools close it is pleasant pandemonium. Little

boys and girls throng the narrow ways and shout in play or quarrel. Ever and again the shrill voice of a mother becomes dominant. But the mothers are so

often handsome, and the children so seldom other than pretty, that no discord or ululation can spoil the vivid beauty of it all.

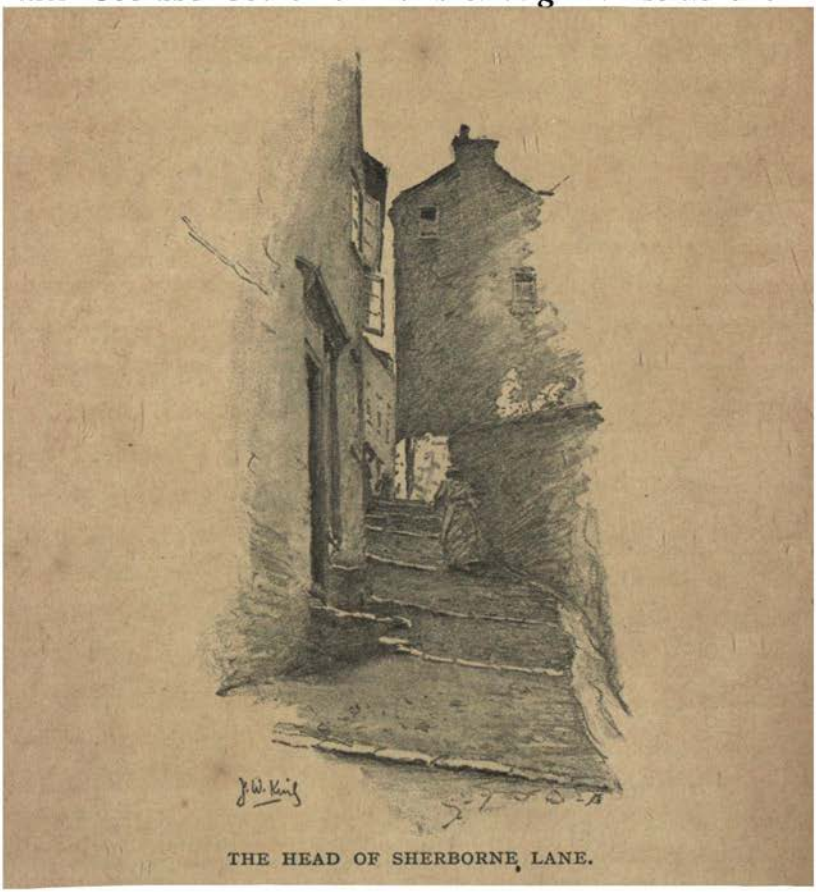
It is never without a sense of trespass that I walk along such streets as Coombe Street or Sherborne

Lane. For one thing, the feeling of social inequality always makes me a little uneasy; an absurd gaucherie, though not snobbishness. But use can cure that. Deeper, however, is the sense that one is violating

THE LYNCH.

privacy. Used to the impenetrable house-fronts of middle class respectability, it is disconcerting to find all doors open; and, since the floors are usually on a lower level than the street, one seems to be prying into the affairs of the inhabitants with an involuntary

superiority and the curiosity of an inspector. To go into Coombe Court is like breaking into some one's



THE HEAD OF SHERBORNE LANE.

private garden. The old women, who, one feels, might fashion one's image of wax, stick pins in it and melt it slowly with fire; the immemorial cats; the grass-

decked cobbles, broken windows, and decaying walls; all seem to resent the intrusion. One slinks away, feeling like a spy. But one may take consolation. One has learned nothing of the secret of Coombe Court.

Sundry little passages lead from Coombe Street down to the banks of the Buddle, Lyme's river, and at the north end of the old town an ancient causeway marches with its banks, among the backs of buildings of many shapes, opposite high, black, crannied walls. The houses are built right down to the river, and here and there one of them strides across it in the old way. It is not an imposing stream. Its waters barely cover the stony bottom, and the discarded tins of Coombe Street shine high and dry. But to stand on its bank, at the foot of one of the little passages, and to look downwards to where it struggles through the heaped shingle and out to the sea beyond, which seems high above one, gives an extraordinary sense of desolation. You forget you are in the centre of a populous town. Like Bedivere, you see nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan, and you feel what an inhuman thing the water is and how greatly to be feared and mistrusted by man.

West of Broad Street, except for the little cluster of Cobb hamlet, everything is eloquent of the popular watering place. The *Alexandra* has nothing of the air of the ancient hostelry which still clings to the *Three*

Cups and the *Lion*. Spacious modern houses have arisen, and lodgings are invitingly to let.

For Lyme Regis, with all its past, has still plenty of life. It belongs to the twentieth century quite as much as it did to the seventeenth. It is not one of the dead cities. Nor, except to the very superior person, is this any matter of sorrow. The rococo life of the modern watering place has its own charm.

To scoff at modern comforts is, moreover, hypocrisy and ingratitude. You say that the railway spoils a place. But you would never have heard of the place, far less have visited it, if it had not been for the railway. Electric light along country roads is, you say, a barbarism. But, out later than you expected on a moonless night, you are not sorry of its aid.

Lyme Regis has electric light. Before I knew this, I was walking up Pound Street in the dark, horribly afraid of the bats, which you can never be sure are not vampires. Or they might not have been bats at all, but decadent descendants of the dread pterodactyl, which was slain by Mary Anning, the Saint Georgina of Lyme Regis. No wonder I felt a little trepid. But suddenly, just ahead, a cheerful light shone out and dispelled my fears. At first I thought it was an angel or a good fairy. The sentimentalists of science would say it was. I offer this story to anyone who is compiling a book of modern parables.

THE CHAINED BIBLE.

CHARMOUTH AND WOOTTON FITZPAINE

Chapter III

CHARMOUTH AND WOOTTON FITZPAINE

BETWEEN the church and the sea at Lyme there is a little lane, which looks as if it would lead to a stable or a farmyard. It has no more dignity than that. Yet it leads to the mighty sea itself, or rather it leads to the brink of the broken cliff down which a rough path leads to the shore. As I stood contemplating this descent, idly and with no definite intention either of starting or of staying, an old gentleman observed contemptuously that it was a dreary sort of place; not worth going down there unless you wanted to dig for fossils. The implied scorn of geology was immense.

The old gentleman then showed me a map of field-paths, which could be bought in the town. It was, I gathered, his morning habit to follow one of the ways marked on the map, though he did not go so far but that he was back in time for a bath at midday. In the afternoon, clean and fed, he took his wife and daughters for a drive. Evidently a man of habits, stiff from his shirt-front inwards. I am sure it was a real annoyance

to him if he had left any of his field-paths untrod when duty called him once more citywards. It is noteable, by the way, that men of this type — goat-bearded, spectacled, starched — always have daughters. Sons, one suspects, refuse to be born to such a father. As girls become more and more emancipated the type must tend to extinction.

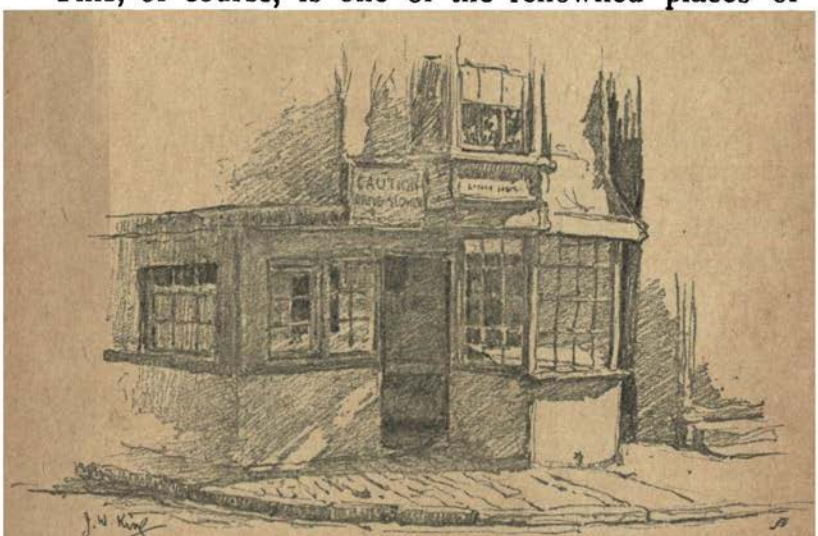
In spite of the old gentleman's disparaging remarks I made my way down to the shore, resolved to walk to Charmouth. Certainly it is a dreary beach. Dunwich, sung by Swinburne for its "miles and miles and miles of desolation" is no drearier. It is, indeed, what the two places have in common—that their cliffs are falling into the sea—that gives them their dreariness. They look so forlorn, these tumbledown cliffs, like neglected houses, or the brick-heaps of Titan builders. You are barely out of Lyme before you feel the loneliness. . . . .

A mile behind me the Cobb stretched out its protecting arm ; a mile ahead Charmouth smiled invitation ; in the distance the great brow of Golden Cap was radiant. Nevertheless I felt myself in one of the waste places of the earth. "A burr had been a treasure trove." I was quite pleased when an old fisherman came towards me, offering not burrs but fossils : ammonites, belemnites, a ball of sparkling pyrites. "Very rare," he said they were, regardless of the fact that you can scarcely walk

on this beach without setting foot on some such remnant of ancient life. Ammonites are as characteristic of this neighbourhood as they are of Whitby; though there they figure in the arms of the town and have a legend of their own. They are the serpents which Saint Hilda decapitated (I forget why), and it is, or used to be, the ambition of local geologists to find a fossil serpent's head. Nothing of the kind appears to be believed at Lyme, where a thriving trade is done. There is a famous fossil shop, which, with characteristic disregard for time, sells fish of the Triassic epoch and this morning's catch at the same counter. My old friend, however, traded on his

own account; and he assured me that he was selling his goods at half price. What the market value of a half-inch ammonite was I did not inquire. But I strongly suspect him of breaking the assize of fossils.

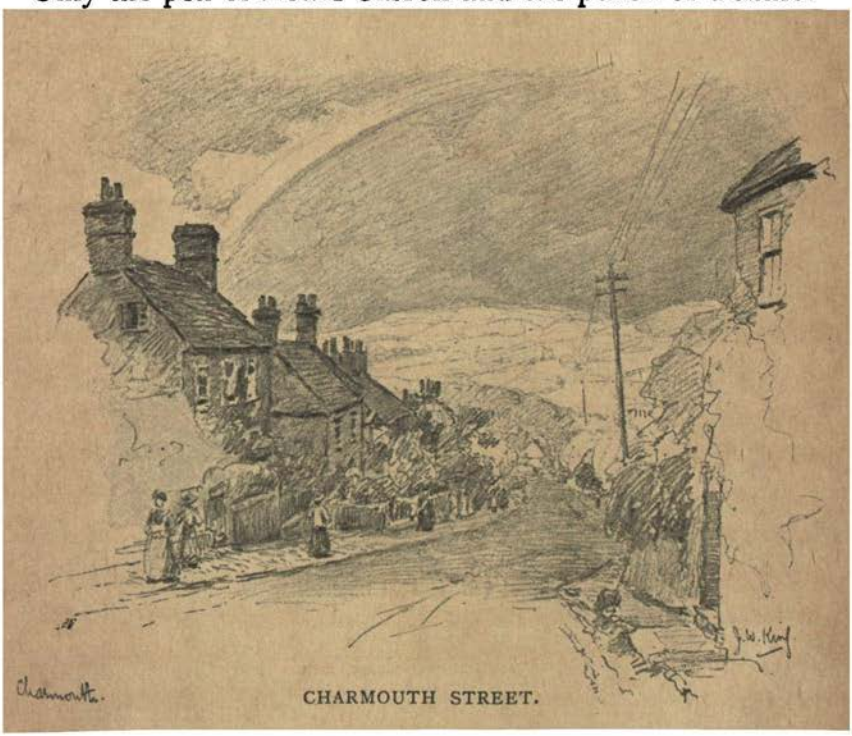
This, of course, is one of the renowned places of



THE FOSSIL SHOP.

England from the geological point of view. It was on this beach between Charmouth and Lyme that Mary Anning, whose window I have mentioned, made her discoveries. The services she did to science were invaluable. At the age of ten she found the ichthyosaurus, and hired workmen to dig him from his lair. Later she tracked down the graceful plesiosaurus and

the grinning pterodactyl. She has received praise and a stained glass window. Species have been given her name. But she has missed her proper monument. Only the pen of Lewis Carroll and the pencil of Tenniel



CHARMOUTH STREET.

could have done justice to that meeting of Mary and the ichthyosaurus.

The parcel-gilt sands at Charmouth and the green fields through which the Char, in the furtive manner of the rivers hereabouts, trickles to the sea, are cheerful

after the untidy grey cliffs. Perhaps, after all, the old gentleman was right and this beach has attractions only for those who want to dig for fossils. To Charmouth by road, along the old Ikenfield way, above the sea, under Timber Hill (which has a right to its name), and through the Devil's Bellows, which also are said, in stormy weather, to be aptly called, is on the whole a pleasanter journey.

It leads you into the village by a steep descent, down what Hutchins calls the Plinlimmon of Dorset, though the hill's real name is Rhodehorn. Charmouth, like nearly every other town and village round, lies in a valley with a sloping bottom. Jane Austen writes of "Charmouth, with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs, where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation." Lately the holiday makers have discovered Charmouth ; but so far it is still the restful place that the author of *Persuasion* found it. There seems no echo, however faint, of those "battles long ago," a thousand years ago, when twice in seven years the Saxons fought valiantly but unsuccessfully to keep the irresistible Danes from landing on the beach here.

The church, "re-edyfied and beautified by Anthony Ellesdon, Esq., 1732," and entirely rebuilt in 1836,

could hardly be expected to provide many attractions, either for antiquary or æsthete. For the student of humanity, however, there is a tomb or two of interest.

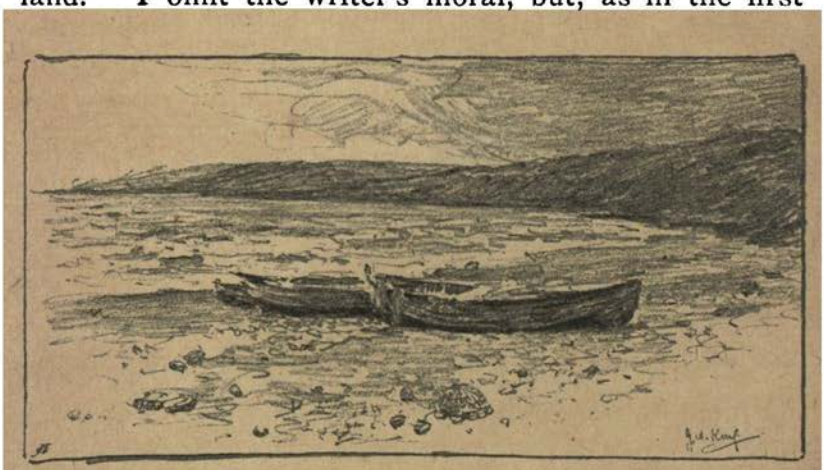
It is a very superficial view that sees in a love of churchyards, or any burial places, evidence of a gloomy and morbid disposition. Surely it is evidence of the very reverse. The seekers of eerie sensations, the decadent brooders, may haunt the charnel house, though, unless their imaginations be powerful, they must usually be disappointed of the desired effect. But the everyday pessimist shuns such places. He is not in love with life, but he does not want to be reminded of death. And it is death, not life, that he finds in the churchyard.

Now, properly speaking, it is life, not death, that should be found there. The churchyard, in fact, is stored with humanity. The dead are there; but they are underground, out of sight. What is in evidence is life. Every epitaph, even the shape of the grave-stones themselves, tells some tale of those that went or of those that were left. For the most part, this is all that is left of either. The cemetery is the storehouse where the leavings of life are garnered. It is a place of fragments, perhaps, of odds and ends and orts. But it teems with life. If you want humanity, you will go to some place crowded with men who are not yet dead.

But, failing that, go to a churchyard. Half a loaf is better than no bread.

Take, for instance, the tomb in God's acre at Charmouth, erected to commemorate Mr. James Warden, a naval lieutenant, who fought in nineteen battles under Hawke, was at the surrender of Belleisle and among the first to land in America on the outbreak of the war, but, surviving all these gallant perils, was shot dead in a duel 28th April, 1792, being then in the fifty-sixth year of his age. The story as told in a footnote to Hutchins' *Dorset* is as follows. "Mr. Warden having a dispute with his neighbour and former friend Mr. Bond, on the subject of game, and language having passed on both sides which the feelings of gentlemen could not brook, a duel was the consequence. The parties met early in the morning in a field near the Hunter's Lodge between Charmouth and Axminster: Mr. Warden attended by a second, and Mr. Bond without one, having found it difficult from the secrecy usually observed on such occasions to procure any gentleman to accompany him, and the more so as his residence at Charmouth had been of too short a date to form many acquaintances. The first fire fell to the lot of Mr. Warden, whose ball passed through Mr. Bond's hat. Mr. Bond was a more unerring marksman; immediately on his firing Mr. Warden fell, being shot through the heart. The coroner's inquest having brought in their verdict Wilful

Murder against Mr. Bond (being perhaps compelled to do so by the circumstance of Mr. Bond having given the challenge, though his behaviour was no other than that of a man of honour, in a truly delicate and distressing situation), he was obliged to seek refuge in a foreign land." I omit the writer's moral, but, as in the first



THE BEACH AT CHARMOUTH.

stanza of the verses on the tomb, though the impiety is admitted, the inevitability of the duel is taken for granted; unless, indeed, some court of honour should be established to settle the disputes of gentlemen. Our ancestors, I fear, would have a poor opinion of the present generation. No one nowadays would get killed for a partridge.

The verses, from our point of view, though scarcely poetry, are not without interest.

Dear victim of imperious Honour's laws,
Those impious laws inexorably stern;
Whose horrors Friendship views with shuddering pause,
And Love connubial shall for ever mourn.

Lamented victim, if th' unbodied mind
Aught of the world it left should haply know,
And watch with tenderest sympathy refin'd
The friends it lov'd, the scenes it priz'd below;

What pleasure mix'd with sadness must be thine
To see thy own ELIZA'S faithfull tears
Profusely bathing the memorial shrine,
Which to thy name unfeign'd affection rears.

Adieu! in one alarming moment torn
By ruffian rage from her thy soul held dear,
Until the dawning of that awful morn,
When the rous'd dead their Saviour's voice shall hear.

The alliterated injustice of the antepenultimate line is, in the circumstances, excusable. What happened to Mr. Bond in foreign lands we know not, but Eliza, "after lingering upwards of six years, at length put off her mortal part, wasted with pining sickness, to be clothed upon with immortality," and was buried beside her unfortunate husband.

Charmouth has had one or two notable rectors. One of them who died in the middle of the self-indulgent eighteenth century (and to whom there is a tablet in the church) so loved his dinner-table that he asked to be buried in it, and his coffin was actually made thereof.

CHARMOUTH

Charmouth lacks imagination, or there would be by now some blood-curdling legend of the groaning board.

A more interesting person than this lover of cates and wine was his successor-but-one, the Reverend John Audain, whose adventures are told by Henry Nelson Coleridge[1] in his entertaining book *Six Months in the West Indies*, a book, by the way, which would be well worth reviving. Audain, who started life as a midshipman, was appointed to Charmouth in 1783, presumably not long after his ordination. He was pre-eminently a militant parson, and it is recorded that he fought a battle at Lyme with an Irish chaise-driver, who beat him. But then, besides the business in hand, Audain was simultaneously delivering a most eloquent sermon. No doubt he found the combination breathless work.

Audain subsequently became rector of Roseau in Dominica. It was there that Coleridge heard of him. I wish I could transcribe his account in full. It is very entertaining, but rather long. I shall, however, quote as much as possible. Audain, a British patriot, though his name suggests a Gaulish ancestry, fitted up a schooner for the purpose of private warfare against the French. "It is even yet fresh in the recollections of

[1] Nephew of the poet and recorder of the Table-Talk.

the inhabitants of Roseau, with how joyful a rapture this holy Dominican once broke off the service on a Sunday, unable to repress the emotions of his triumph on seeing the vessel of his faith sail into the bay with a dismasted barque laden with sugar, rum, and other Gallic vanities from Martinique." Soon after this the gallant clerk lost his luck. A friend of Coleridge's met him one day at Basseterre in St. Kitt's, "surrounded by negroes, to whom he was distributing plantains, yams, potatoes, and other eatables, and holding private talk with them all by turns. Having caught my friend's eye, he came up to him and said, 'I am going to smuggle all these —— rascals this evening to Guadeloupe.' He did so in his schooner, but remained himself on shore. A privateer of Nevis captured the smuggler before she could get to her market. Audain became furious, went himself to Nevis, and challenged the owner of the privateer to fight. The challenge was not accepted, and Audain immediately posted the name of the recusant, as that of a scoundrel, on the wall of the court-house. He himself for two days kept watch upon the platform, with a sword and four pistols stuck in his belt, to see if anyone dared to touch the shields."

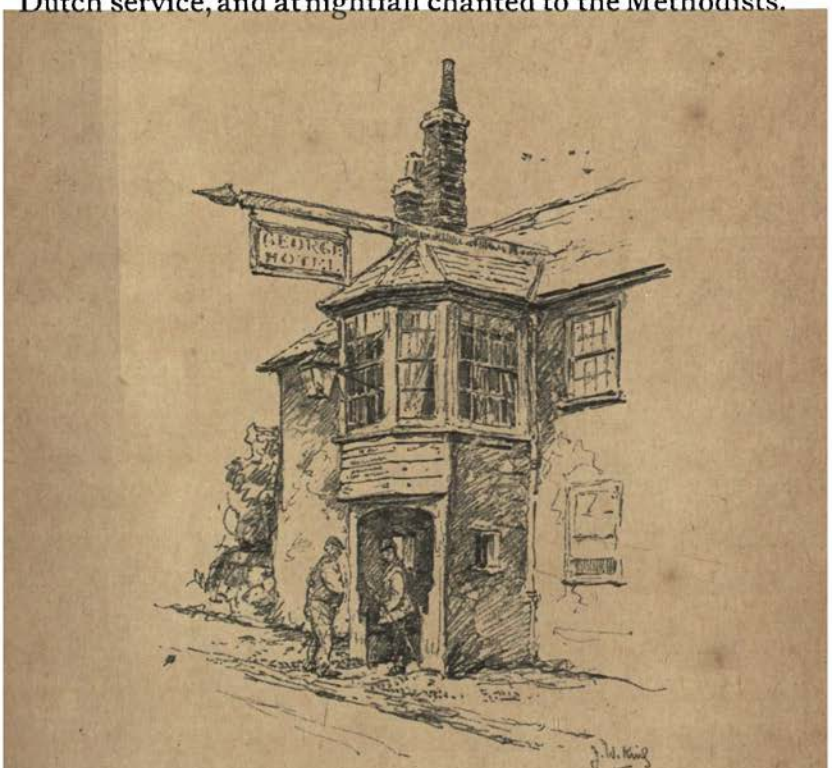
Undaunted and truculent, Audain fitted out another schooner in which he sailed in person. But on the second day of his voyage he was captured by a Spanish trader (better armed than he had thought), his crew

butchered and himself only saved by the miraculous hap that his conqueror was a man whom he had once served. These misfortunes told against him at Roseau. Unless justified by success, smuggling and privateering were deadly sins in a parson. So Audain threw up the living

COTTAGE, ONCE THE "QUEEN'S ARMS" INN.

and went to St. Domingo, where he lived for a time as a legitimate trader. But ere long he had challenged and nearly killed two black officers, and had to leave hastily to escape hanging from a tamarind tree. He next went to St. Eustatius, where "were many religions, but no priest." Audain, essentially liberal-minded, offered comprehensively to supply the want. His offer was accepted and "in the morning he celebrated mass

in French, in the forenoon read the liturgy of the Church of England, in the afternoon spräckened the Dutch service, and at nightfall chanted to the Methodists."



THE "GEORGE" INN.

Rendered poor by his losses, he listened gladly to the blandishments of a wealthy and massive Dutch widow. To make certain that all was correct, the bridegroom himself performed the ceremony; but seeing that he

already had a wife in England, the irregularity was unimportant.

When Coleridge wrote, in 1825, Audain, a man of sixty, was still living at St. Eustatius. But he was a reformed character, and the noise of his praying disturbed his neighbours at night. With his wives he was on excellent terms; the Dutch wife loving and tending him, the English sending him Christmas presents. Truly, he was a man of parts. He had fought thirteen duels, was a skilled boxer, and, on one occasion at least, combined the two forms of combat. "He was a singularly eloquent preacher in the pathetic and suasory style, and he rarely failed to draw down tears upon the cheeks of most of those who heard him. His manners were fine and gentle, and his appearance even venerable. He was hospitable to the rich and gave alms to the poor." The autobiography, which Coleridge heard and hoped he was writing, seems, unfortunately, to have been a myth. The *Dictionary of National Biography* ought certainly to have taken cognizance of such a hero. I know not where or when he died. With whatever regrets, we must go back to Charmouth without him.

The *Queen's Arms* Inn, where Charles II. slept, no longer hangs out the bush. It became a school, where Dean Alford got the rudiments of his learning, and is now the home of the minister of the congregationalist

church. In its public days it flaunted a sign, on which was written :

> Here in this house was lodged King Charles,
> Come in, sirs, you may venture ;
> For here is entertainment good
> For churchman or dissenter.

This sign was for years in the possession of Mr. Bragg, the parson gourmand aforementioned. The house retired into private life, and the *George*, more noticeable opposite, was frequently the object of mistaken interest as the supposed resting-place of the royal fugitive. The *George*, though a gramophone and a musical box now threaten melody from the counter, is a respectable old house enough, and offers excellent entertainment, but it has had to renounce the claim which has been reasserted by the house opposite, where, since 1902, a tablet has proclaimed its dignity. Were Charles to return—a merry monarch but a ghostly—he would probably fail at first to recognise the house where he spent some of the few anxious moments of his careless life. Inside, however, he would find familiar traces in the oaken ceilings and other old features. The great chimney-place was apparently built later and in his honour, and at one time bore the royal monogram and the eventful date.

The troubled spirit of the Stuarts haunts this country. One finds it at Axminster and at Bridport,

at Beaminster, Chardstock and Ashe. You have seen how persistent it is at Lyme. Historically speaking, it is the soul of Charmouth. The vikings who reddened the tawny sands with Saxon blood have no part therein. For them you must go to Beer.

With all due deference to Mr. Douglas Ainslie, the epic of the Stuarts has yet to find its writer. It needs a great poet, and unhappily, for a time at any rate, the large, romantic spirit, whose breath alone could inspire to such a task, sleeps or is on a journey. Perhaps it will return. But (with Mr. Andrew Lang) one fears that a new heaven and a new earth must come first.

It would, indeed, be a cycle rather than a single epic. Two Odysseys would be but parts of it: that which began at Worcester and that which began at Culloden. These, at least, are unaccountably left unwritten. In the first of them Charmouth would gain its literary immortality. Alas! it is not for me to bestow that. I can only retell in a pedestrian way, and with becoming brevity, how Charles II. came to the *Queen's Arms* Inn and what befell there.

The battle of Worcester had been fought and lost. The king had got safe to Trent, near Sherborne. The matter was to get him out of England, for his enemies were following every scent. One design had already come to nothing, when Colonel Wyndham, his

Majesty's host, bethought him of a certain Captain William Ellesden of Lyme, who had had a hand in getting Sir John Berkeley over the sea. Wyndham went to Lyme, found Ellesden and told his story, taking the precaution, however, to name only Lord Wilmot as concerned in the adventure. Ellesden, a staunch loyalist, readily promised his aid. He brought the colonel to Charmouth to a tenant of his, Stephen Limbry, who agreed for a fee of sixty pounds to have a boat in readiness in Charmouth roads at a given date and to conduct the party, of whose names and rank he was, of course, ignorant, safely to France.

The preliminaries settled, Wyndham's next concern was to get the king to Charmouth, and also to provide that his midnight departure should not arouse suspicions. He sent his servant, Henry Peters, to the *Queen's Arms;* and Peters, over a glass of wine, told the landlady, a sentimental soul, a gallant story of how his master loved a lady of Devon, and she him again, how stern parents thwarted their desires, and of how the lovers had decided for an elopement. He then arranged that the best room in the inn should be theirs for the appointed evening, though they would not sleep there but leave in the small hours of the following morning.

The day came. Julia Coningsby, Lady Wyndham's niece, rode postillion behind the King. The Colonel accompanied them, while Lord Wilmot and the man

Peters followed at some distance, as though unconnected. The King masqueraded as William Jackson. On the way they called at the house of Captain Ellesden's brother, where Charles made himself known to the captain and gave him a piece of gold "in which, in his solitary hours, he made a hole to put a ribbon in."

Then the party went on to Charmouth to wait for Limbry. They waited. A serious hitch had occurred in that well-intentioned seaman's plans. His wife, uninformed of his project, and suspicious of his secrecy, had locked him in his room, where she kept him until morning. Meanwhile the anxious Royalists had sent a message to Ellesden, who advised a prompt departure from Charmouth. So, thwarted once more, they rode on to Bridport.

Ellesden's advice was wise. Suspicion had been aroused in other breasts besides the flinty Mrs. Limbry's. The King's horse had needed shoeing and the smith, Hammet, a man who knew his trade, noticed that the beast had been shod in three separate shires, and that one of the three was Worcestershire, the county in all men's thoughts. The ostler at the *Queen's Arms*, already in a state of curiosity about these strange gentlemen who had kept their horses saddled all night, went off at once to Mr. Wesley, the minister. But the parson was praying, and prayed so

long that the ostler could not wait for the "Amen." When Wesley was at last told the news, Charles and his friends were well on the Bridport road.

This Mr. Wesley, who was great grandfather of the founder of Methodism, was a dry man who loved not romance. He favoured the roundhead cause and would gladly have apprehended the fugitive king. It was in an ill and sarcastic temper that he walked into the *Queen's Arms* Inn that morning. "Why, how now, Margaret!" he greeted the landlady. "You are a maid of honour now." "What mean you by that, Mr. Parson?" quoth she. "Why, Charles Stuart lay last night at your house, and kissed you at his departure; so that now you can't be but a maid of honour." Margaret fired up. "If I thought it was the King," she retorted, "I would think the better of my lips all the days of my life, and so you, Mr. Parson, get out of my house." So poor Mr. Wesley retired, but it was lucky for Mistress Margaret that those were not the days of the Bloody Assizes.

At Bridport Charles put up at the *George*. Here again he was all but discovered. The place was full of soldiers and servants. The King, himself acting in the latter capacity, must mingle with the crowd in the yard. An ostler greeted him with puzzled recognition, and but for that ready wit of the Stuart's it is probable that his disguise would have been pierced. Anyway, another

AT THE FOOT OF CHARMOUTH STREET.

move was thought advisable. So the party took a by-road to Broadwindsor, where once more they found themselves in an inn-parlour full of soldiers. Fate seemed fighting for the roundheads, but an unexpected ally appeared in the person of a young woman, in the excitement of whose sudden travail the strangers were forgotten. Their next move was back to Trent, and so out of my story. How Charles at length got out of England, and how, after many adventures, he came back to his own again are no concern of ours.

It was not without trepidation that I crossed the bridge at the end of Charmouth village. Till then I had been walking carelessly enough, swinging my stick and smoking a cigarette, boding no ill. But in the middle of this bridge was a tablet, grimly giving notice that this was a county bridge, and that anyone injuring it would be guilty of felony and liable to transportation for life. Gingerly but rapidly I made my way to solid earth, for one may offend unwittingly, and I had no desire to be snatched from home and friends. The strange thing was that this was not the bridge over the mighty Char, but over the most attenuated of streamlets, evidently the "little broket" of Leland. When I got to the river there was no such threat.

By continuing on the Roman road you get to Morecombelake, then to Chideock, and at last to Bridport; or, by following a lane which leaves the road on the left,

about half a mile past the Char, you can take in that fascinating backwater, Whitchurch Canonicorum, and come back on to the road again at Morecombelake. For the moment, however, I propose to do neither of these things. A road which runs northward between the stream of the perilous passage and the kindlier Char (giver of trout to patient mortals) has caught my fancy.

It leads up hill to Catherston Leweston.

Why so very small a place should have so very large a name I cannot conceive. The disproportion is blatant. When you think of London, Paris, Berlin and so on, with their five or six letters apiece, it seems absurd that this diminutive hamlet—the tautology is deliberate and necessary—should require two names, six syllables, eighteen letters to describe it. Nor can I find any reason for the double-barrelled denomination. Paynes have held the manor, and Wadhams and Jefferys, and since then a host of others, but never a Leweston, if indeed there ever were such a family. It would certainly have been appropriate that the parish should have taken its name from one of the manorial lords, for besides the manor house there is apparently only one other in the place, and that is the manor farm. There is also a church, built fifty years ago and considered one of the finest in the county of modern erection.

The pleasant lane which passes the imposing gates of the manor house forms a delightful balcony from

which to look down on Charmouth and the silver sea beyond. It is characteristic of the roads round here that so many of them form such balconies; and this country is lovelier in its valleys than in its hills. If

WOOTTON FITZPAINE.

there is a hill, there is always a reason for climbing it. But the reason is not always the same. In Scotland, for example, you climb either for the sake of climbing, or else to see more hills. In this country you climb to admire the valleys. The vale of the Char is well worth climbing to see.

If you go on climbing, you come to another place with

a double name. Dorset indeed is full of them. It is also full of Woottons. Wootton Fitzpaine, or Wootton Maltravers as it has also been called, is one of a family of six. But it is a village of some size, and so, even if it did not need the distinction, would not deserve the animadversions which (I don't quite know why) I have just been heaping on poor little Catherston Leweston. But even here my carping spirit finds a criticism to make. If there is no discrepancy of size, there is a distinct discrepancy of character. Wootton Fitzpaine is a fine feudal name, smacking of the age when it was given.

But there is now hardly anything else that is old. Except Rousdon—the baby of the district—I have come across no village in these parts of so modern an appearance. There was building in progress here, and building there, for all the world like a garden suburb. All the modern architectural signs of red brick and pebble-dash and beams were present. The new art of architecture had evidently penetrated to this little out-of-the-world place. It was a striking phenomenon after old-world Charmouth.

A large hall, this also very much in the modern manner, erected in 1906 to the memory of Mr. Alfred Capper Pass, gave me the required enlightenment. Mr. Pass was lord of the manor of Wootton Fitzpaine, and this hall was put up by his widow and by his son, the present lord.

So all these bright new buildings, in the midst of their rich bright gardens—for the gardens are notable even for this fertile land—are evidence that here are landowners caring for the well-being of their tenants, taking pride in the place of which wealth or birthright has given them possession; evidence, that is, of how

IN MONKTON WYLD CHURCHYARD.

fine a thing our old patriarchal system may be. Combpyne, untouched, as it seems, for ages, is on the whole more picturesque. So we say, at least; though perhaps only by a convention. Humanly, at any rate, Wootton Fitzpaine is more satisfactory. Prosperity, when it is not merely commercial and avaricious and

ugly, is very pleasant to contemplate. There is almost an Utopian touch about Wootton Fitzpaine. So, perhaps, I was wrong after all about the discrepancy. One scents a benevolent feudalism.

The westward road leads past the hamlet of Champernhayes towards Monkton Wyld, which, for purposes of local government, is still part of Wootton.

Now, thought I, I will not go to Monkton Wyld. Its spire among the trees was charming, and I thought—though I admit without warrant from experience of its neighbours—that a nearer view might spoil the impression. So I turned my back on Champernhayes Farm, which is marked on the map, and took to a little lane which pointed more or less in the direction of Lyme Regis. The lane went down hill at various angles until it crossed a little stream which apparently worked a mill. At that point it left off all pretence of being a road, and showed itself in its true character as the stony bed of an only partially dried torrent. Also, with occasional fits of repentance, it began to climb. Underfoot it grew muddier, the hedges grew high and thick, and overhead the branches joined hands. One might almost have been in a tunnel under earth, had not an occasional glimpse of the spire of Monkton Wyld church been surety that one was actually high up and climbing higher.

Out on the road, where a prone labourer remarks

sympathetically on the heat, you get the fruit of your climbing. This is Thistle Hill, the summit whereof is well over five hundred feet up. Through a gap in the hedge you get the view. There is an ugly red house in the foreground, but you look over that. Tiny Hogchester lies in the near hollow, a mere cluster. Behind it Catherston Leweston appears as a patch of trees; and to the right long Charmouth, with the hills beyond. Then the sea, with the Isle of Portland faint in the far distance. "The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls." What an incomparable piece of impressionism! Seen and accepted in a flash, and expressed at last in the perfect phrase—terse and complete. High above the sea one inevitably remembers that line, in which Tennyson admitted us to brotherhood with the eagle.

Inland from your gap, copse-crowned Conegar Hill lies nearest; and over its shoulder you can see far down the broad vale of Marshwood, once famed for its oaks; a glimpse of Whitchurch Canonicorum; and southward, beyond Catherston, the summit of Hardown Hill, its tumuli atop and Morecombelake below. The view has been worth the climb, but it is pleasant to think that you are at the top of a hill and Lyme at the bottom.

WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM TO CHIDEOCK AND BRIDPORT

CHAPTER IV

WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM TO CHIDEOCK AND BRIDPORT

WHEN you got to the cross-ways at Wootton Fitzpaine, you might, instead of turning to the left, have turned to the right. Or you might not have gone to Wootton at all, but have kept on to the eastward for half a mile out of Charmouth and then struck north-east up the little lane which I have already mentioned. Either course would have been worth taking, for either would have brought you to Whitchurch Canonicorum.

And Whitchurch Canonicorum is one of the flowers of Dorset. It lies off any high road, but there are several ways of getting to it besides the two already suggested. It is a sort of centre of lanes. There is that leading westward to Wootton, and that leading south-westward to Charmouth. One leads south-eastward to Morecombelake and Chideock, another eastward (with a southerly twist) to Ryall. Two wander in vague northerly directions and get nowhere in particular, at least not for some time. If you

followed them far enough, however, one would take you to Pilsdon and the other, eventually, to Stoke Abbott. You would cross the river Char or its tributaries four times on the way.

But one does not go to Whitchurch Canonicorum for the sake of the facility of getting away from it. On the contrary, it is emphatically a place in which to linger. The village, lying so still in its sleepy hollow, is full of charms. It is a spot where one for whom peace had come to mean more than anything else the world had to offer might well end his days, having found in full measure that which he desired. But the real soul of the place is its church. Whitchurch, at least, is appropriately named.

If there is truth in tradition, no less a personage than Alfred the Great was the first builder of a church here. By his will, which he made in 901, he left *Hwitan Cyrican* to his youngest son, Ethelwald. Between that date and the making of Domesday Book it became a cell of the Benedictine abbey of St. Wandrille in Normandy. *Album Monasterium* it was called in those days, and the monks busied themselves with improving Alfred's church. Much of their work is still to be seen: the south doorway, the large arches in the south nave arcade and the font. Somewhere about 1200 the monks gave or sold Whitchurch to the Bishop of Salisbury, who, about the time when John

A COTTAGE INTERIOR.

Lackland was setting an unwilling hand to the Great Charter, made it over to Robert de Mandeville, lord of the Marshwood Vale and the great man of the district. This Robert continued the work that the monks had left unfinished, building in the new fashion

WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM.

of his day. That is why we find the round Norman arches and the pointed Early English side by side. The transept also was Robert's work, but after he had been a quarter of a century in possession, he presented the church to Bishop Josceline of Bath, who proposed to appropriate the rectory to the dean and chapter of Wells. At this point a momentary difficulty arose. By the terms of the Bishop of Salisbury's grant

to Robert de Mandeville, an annual pension of £60 was reserved to the dean and chapter of the cathedral church. Salisbury naturally did not want to be supplanted by Wells. So commissioners were appointed who took the sensible course of making an equal division of the rectorial profits between the two chapters. It was thus that Whitchurch became Whitchurch of the Canons.

Architecturally this is one of the most interesting churches in the county. But it is far more than that. To tell the truth, mere architecture, except in really beautiful manifestations, interests me very faintly. I can barely distinguish, much less grow enthusiastic about, styles. But in a place like Whitchurch architecture implies so much more than itself. For instance, it adds enormously to the value of the fine fourteenth century tower to know that it is a sailor's landmark.

Then there are the curiously carved stones embedded high up in the walls of the tower and in other parts of the building, of which no one knows the history. On one is an axe and a ship; on another an axe and some other weapon, "resembling an iron socketted celt," which appears alone on a third stone. Then there is a mystic wheel, which might belong to any age or creed; and lastly, inside the church on the south wall, the Holy Grail itself. Remember how near Glastonbury is, and that the abbey had land within a

few miles of Whitchurch. If one could only believe that some old monk, skilled with his chisel, and of great sanctity, had been permitted to see Joseph of Arimathea's holy vessel with his own eyes and had fashioned its likeness in stone!

But Whitchurch Canonicorum has its own sacred things. In the north transept, which is early thirteenth century work, there is an ancient and nameless altar tomb. A former vicar, William Palmer, who was described by Newman as the only thoroughly learned man among the initiators of the Tractarian movement, opened this tomb about the middle of the last century and found therein a coffin containing bones. It was supposed that these were what was left of some De Mandeville, and the grave was closed again. But in 1900 some repairs done to the north wall of the church, in which a fissure had appeared, disturbed the shrine and rendered necessary a second opening.[1] Inside was a stone coffin and inside that a leaden reliquary. The bones appeared to be those of a small woman. Coffin and reliquary were both broken, but the latter had one

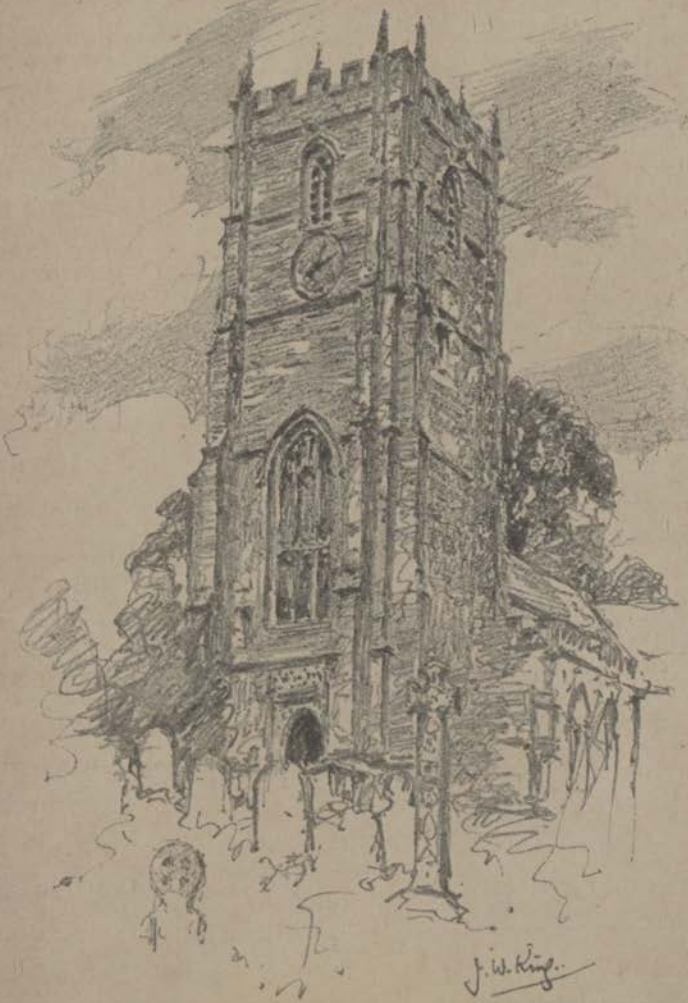
[1] There often seems to be a touch of the supernatural in the way the elements lend their aid to these discoveries. In the church of Wenhaston in Suffolk there was, for ages, across the chancel arch a great screen of whitewashed wood. During repairs (a few years ago) this was taken down and put in the churchyard. In the night rain fell and disclosed what is now one of the best-known mediæval church paintings in England.

undamaged side, on which the following inscription was embossed:

+ HIC - REQESCT - RELIQE - SCE - WITE
HERE REST THE REMAINS OF SAINT WITA.

The grave was reverently closed, but the question remained open. Who was this Saint Wita? And what was the precise connection between her and the name of the parish? Various suggestions have been made, but the best seems to be that put forward by Mr. Baring-Gould, so learned in saintly lore, that the little bones belong to a Breton saint, Gwen or Candida or Blanche (or Wita or White), who was not only canonised herself but was the mother of four saints. Mr. Baring-Gould's arguments will be found at length in the excellent booklet written by the Rev. D. Holland Stubbs, sometime curate-in-charge of Whitchurch, which may be bought at the post-office for sixpence. He thinks that Athelstan, who was a friend to Breton refugees, and settled many of them in Cornwall and Wessex, gave these relics to the church of his grandfather's foundation. He also very plausibly connects the carved stones already mentioned—the ship and the axe and the celt—with the story of Gwen's captivity on board a pirate ship, where two of her fingers were cut off with an axe.[1]

[1] She escaped by walking on the water to Brittany, where the line of foam left by the turning tide is still called "the track of St. Blanche."



WHITCHURCH TOWER.

There was formerly a painted inscription on the front of the tomb. This is now entirely lost, and within man's memory nothing has been decipherable except

CANDIDA . . .
CANDIDIORQUE . . .

Now it takes no great erudition to see that this is the truncation of an elegiac couplet. It is very truncated, certainly, but what there is is suggestive. The learned often build on scantier data than this. Anyway, though no skilled epigraphist, I have attempted a reconstruction.

CANDIDA MUNDANIS OLIM VIVEBAT IN AULIS,
CANDIDIORQUE NITENS VIVIT IN AEDE DEI.

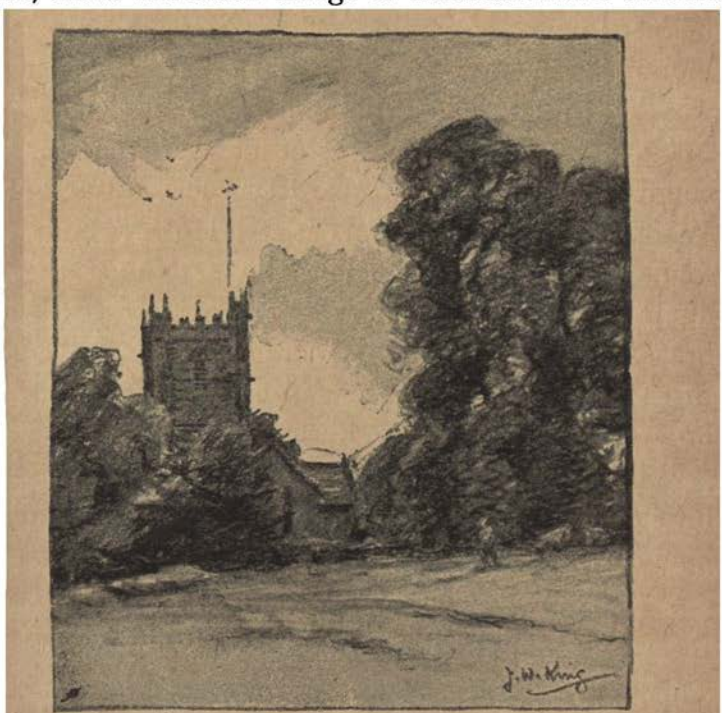
ONCE WHITE IN WORLDLY PALACES SHE TROD;
WHITER SHE SHINETH IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.

Not very good Latin, nor very good verse, but well enough for the period. It will be noted that the word *aulis* suggests that the saint was of good position. Now Gwen's father was Emyr Llydaw, a prince of Brittany, and her second husband, Fragan, was the Duke of Cornwall's cousin. It is true, however, that the local belief that Candida was a Roman princess receives equal support from this evidence.

But, whoever Wita was, and however she came to Whitchurch of the Canons, here, at least, is her undoubted shrine; and, whatever your creed—unless you be utterly God-forsaken in your materialism—you will hardly help

feeling a little awe that the bones of a little woman should still be held venerable after all these centuries.

Though they must needs appear pale beside the shrine, there are other things of interest in the church.



WHITCHURCH CANONICORUM.

The south door is particularly beautiful, and the gargoyles are more than usually grotesque. There is a Norman font, recovered from base farm uses by Mr. Palmer. The varied mouldings of the arches are

notable, and there is a fine Jacobean pulpit. An elaborate tomb of the same epoch covers the remains of Sir John Jeffery of Catherston, who died 7th May, 1611. His effigy is clad in ornate armour, and his actual helmet hangs overhead. Near him, under a severer monument, lies John Wadham, also of Cathertson, "who was dewring his life time captayne of the Quene's Ma^ties castell of Sandeefote besides Waymouth, in the countye of Dorset, and also Recorder of Lyme Regis. Whose soule God rest in pese." He was akin to the founder of Wadham College. We shall meet the name again at Branscombe in Devon. A few years ago a brass tablet was put up to commemorate the burial of Sir George Somers, who, as already described, was brought home from the Bermudas to lie here.

While I was noting these things, a wren was flying hither and thither about the church. It was quite at home, for, as everyone knows,

The robin and the wren
Are God's cock and hen.

This little bird, however, I suspected of being no common heavenly fowl. And when I saw it hovering familiarly round the shrine, I knew. So I made a new rhyme:

The little brown wren
Is the soul of St. Gwen.

Of the many lanes leading from Whitchurch I chose

that which would take me to Morcombelake, and so to Chideock. It was an uphill walk. Chardown Hill was on the right, Hardown Hill on the left, and as both are six hundred feet high there was not much else to be seen for a time. Presently, however, I had a vision. I had got nearly through the straggle of houses which is the village of Morcombelake. My eyes, probably, were on the ground, my mind on a journey. Suddenly, I looked to the south and saw. Chardown had, unnoticed, fallen behind me, and now, as I turned, lay to the right. To the left, more distant, were the long ridge of Langdon Hill and the back of Golden Cap. Between them lay the sea, which I had forgotten. But the sloping hills framed a picture which I do not forget. The lucent silver of the sea tarnished imperceptibly into the duller silver of the sky, and overhead the colourless autumn sun was a blaze of pure light. That was all. But it was magic, the stuff of dreams. There were no colour, no lines; nothing but light. Three elements were dissolved into a purity which, but for the foil of the fourth, had been beyond the comprehension of mortal senses. No wonder there are poets.

A little further on I came to something very different. That was a church. Not an old and stately church, like the one where I had been spending my morning, but a church built, I believe, some time in the 'forties. Now modern churches are usually abominable, especially

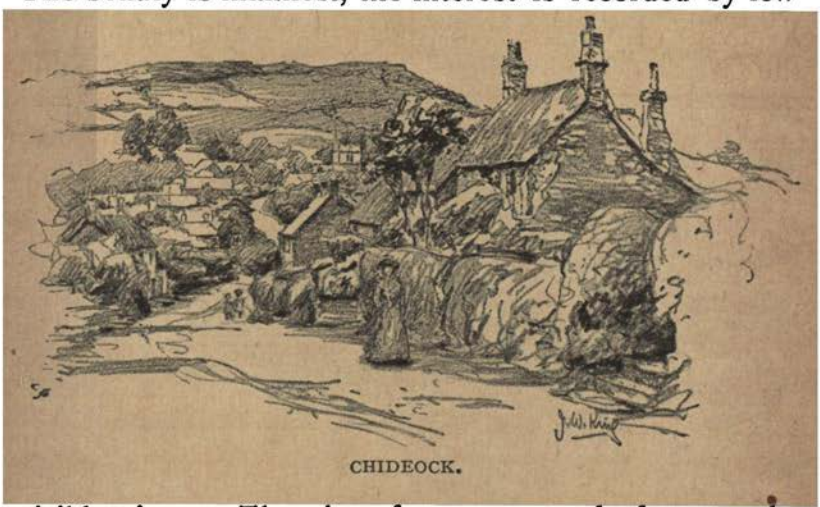
where there has been money to spend on costly and vulgar upholstery, senseless decorations and hideous glass. They are probably a chief cause of the decay of religion. The church of Stanton St. Gabriel is not like that. It is very simple. The walls are white-washed; dark rafters are the ceiling's only decoration; there are no monuments. The rood screen, which is severe but graceful, is old. It came from the former church of St. Gabriel, which lies a mile away, a ruin by the sea. I seemed to have found here the type of all that is best in Puritanism; and at Whitchurch Canonicorum the type of all that is best in Catholicism. My day had been fortunate, for it must not be forgotten that I had also seen the Beauty which is at the root of all worship.

About Chideock, or between Chideock and Bridport, or perhaps a little further east still, for the eye travels ahead of the body, one comes to the essential boundary between Devon and Dorset. All the country that I have been exploring, from Lyme to Chideock and several miles inland, differs in no particular from the adjacent corner of Devon.[1] It is the same rich broken clay land. The lush vale of Marshwood, for instance, is a typical South Devon valley. But eastward, or northward if

[1] I thus challenge county patriotism with the greater hardihood, because a few years ago there was actually considerable agitation to get Lyme Regis transferred to Devon.

you go as far as Beaminster, you come upon the bare, close-cropped hills and beautiful curves of the chalk, so typical of much of Dorset and Wiltshire, but not of Devon.

Chideock is a village both interesting and beautiful. The beauty is manifest, the interest is recorded by few



CHIDEOCK.

visible signs. The site of a moat stands for a castle. A marble figure in the church represents the knightly owners thereof.

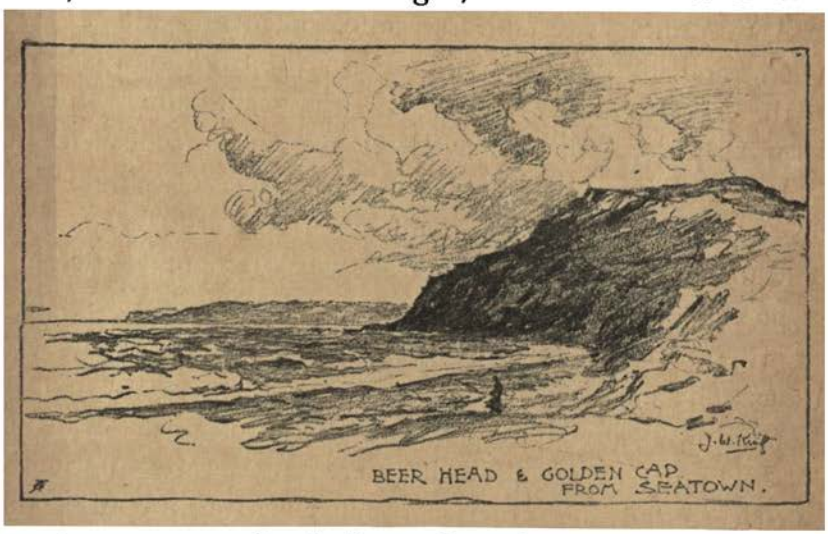
The Mandevilles, whom we have already met at Whitchurch Canonicorum, were at one time lords of Chideock. But before the thirteenth century was out, Geoffrey de Mandeville had sold the manor to John Gervase of Bridport, whose son and namesake eventually called himself John Chideock. There were

Chideocks at Chideock (Johns every man of them) for four generations more, until, in the year that red rose yielded to white, the last of them died, leaving two daughters to divide his lands. Chideock was part of the share of Catherine, who married for her second husband Sir John Arundell, whose descendants had the manor for more than three centuries, until, a hundred years ago, they sold it to the Welds. This is good clean descent. If you like such things, it will give you pleasure. If you do not, I apologise.

The great gate of the castle, where these Chideocks and Arundells lived, stood till the middle of the eighteenth century; but the bulk of the building had been destroyed—"slighted" was the current euphemism—by the men of the Parliament a hundred years before. The royalists there annoyed the garrison of Lyme Regis to some purpose. They lost it for a time, it is true, to the brave Captain Pyne, but subsequently retook it; so the roundheads, on getting in a second time, thought it best to pluck the feathers from so dangerous a shuttlecock. To-day there is only the overgrown moat to help the imagination to picture these doings.

Chideock boasts a suburb. Holiday makers, attracted by its charm, have found its one drawback in the half mile of road that divides them from their bath. So, on the very edge of the sea, Seatown has grouped itself round the coastguard station. A little self-conscious,

perhaps, a little too fully aware of its vocation as the pleasure home of the polite, it is nevertheless a dear little place. The green cliffs stoop down protectingly on either side; the golden sand is at its feet; the blue sea, scintillant in the sunlight, seems tender to it as



a lover. A spoilt darling of a place: no wonder if it is a little vain.

A couple of miles of good road, skirting, halt way, the northern edge of Eype Down, divides Chideock from Bridport. The earthworks on Eype Down are to the antiquary well worth a brief abandonment of the high road; and Symondsbury church has rather far-fetched literary associations as the burial place of Bishop Gulston of Bristol, Joseph Addison's uncle.

As for Bridport, it is a town; but it is not, I think, a ballad, or at the most a poor one. It had a mint in the days of the Confessor and a charter from Henry III. In the stories of the Civil War and of Monmouth it played the part of poor relation to Lyme. A king once watered horses and fooled an ostler at the *George* Inn. A tablet now marks the traditional site of the exploit. Rope-making was the great industry here, and the trade still thrives. It was ordained by Act of Parliament that "ropes for the Navie of England" should be "twisted and made noe where else." Leland, who thought it "a fair larg town," wrote: "At Bridporth be made good daggers." But the industrious itinerant was the victim of a phrase. A Bridport dagger was the cant term for the hempen rope with which a man might be hanged by the neck until he was dead.

There are a couple of interesting houses in South Street, and the cruciform church of Saint Mary is a fine specimen of perpendicular and early English architecture. The cross-legged knight who lies there in effigy is thought to be a Chideock. He would have been some generations prior to the man who is buried in Chideock church.

West Bay is Bridport's harbour, though by no means content to be merely that. Quite lately it has started life on its own account as a watering place, and new lodging-houses are perking up beside the old quay.

I have heard the little place held up to ridicule, but I do not quite see why. It may not have the attractions of Lyme or Charmouth or Chideock, but it has a quaint atmosphere of its own, and the neighbouring cliffs are attractive enough. Moreover, there is bathing and boating and golfing. Can the holiday heart of man require more? The upkeep of this haven has been in times past nearly as costly as the Cobb at Lyme Regis itself. That, at all events, is a title to respect.

There is a path all the way along the cliffs—over West Cliff, down again to Eype mouth, round Thorncombe Beacon, among the tumuli, over Dog-house Hill and Ridge Cliff—from West Bay to Seatown. It is a fine bracing tramp, but if you are game for more the real climb is yet to come. Giant Golden Cap looms ahead, six hundred feet high, and you will lose the path before you get to the top.

For the path is not so brave as you. Half way up the slope it slinks inland and joins a lane which goes behind the Titan's back, between him and his neighbour Langdon Hill. This also is a pleasant road to follow, and a solitary. If when you get to the crossroads you keep the westward way, you will get to tiny Upcot and thence, if you like, back to the coast near the summit of Cain's Folly. If you turn northward you will come to Morecombelake. In either case you will be skirting the

unkempt Chardown Hill. So you will if from Morecombelake you follow the old track, instead of the nice new road, to Charmouth and Lyme. Not only will you skirt Chardown, but you will go sheer over Stonebarrow Hill and get a splendid view. For the land will drop, drop from your feet right down to the Char, and you will be able to follow its course up the Marshwood Valley.

But these are hypotheses; it is with the great fact of Golden Cap that I am concerned. Well, as I was saying, I lost the path. (I only said *you* out of politeness. I meant *me* all the time.) So I scrambled straight upwards till I reached the top. There I rested and looked round. On either side the edge of the land rose and fell, first the grey face of a cliff, then a green dip with a town in it, as is the fashion all along this coast. Portland Island bounded my view on the east, Beer Head (I think) on the west. Inland I seemed to be looking over half a county, where all the greens of the world were gathered for review. Just at my feet lay St. Gabriel's farm, and near by, forlorn in the corner of a field, the shards of the old church.

It is a lonely parish, Stanton St. Gabriel. Its thousand acres hold but fifty souls. On its seaward edge, one might be in a deserted land, alone with rabbits and crows.

That is to say, as far as the sight of humanity goes.

Between Seatown and Charmouth I do not think that I saw a man. But there must be few places in England where one is for long out of hearing of civilisation. Sometimes, when one is alone in a wide country, one hears far off the voices of men, sometimes bells ringing, and always the distant barking of dogs. But these sounds only intensify the sense of loneliness.

It is rough going, the descent from Golden Cap along the Wear Cliffs. At one point I found myself in a deep gully which, in bad weather, would probably carry a brave torrent, and had to scramble up the wet clay slope on the other side. Such incidents delayed my progress, and the sun was already sinking behind Lyme. Cain's Folly still lay between me and Charmouth, holding I knew not what terrors. So the next time these inhospitable cliffs showed an inclination to deposit me on the beach I took them at their word, and made the rest of my heavy way to Charmouth through the shingle. As a matter of fact, if I had only persevered up Cain's Folly I should have found a path. But I did not know that.

It was quite dark by the time I reached Charmouth, but the rest of my journey was on a good road, and soon the sprinkled lights of Lyme became my visible encouragement.

UPLYME TO HUNTER'S LODGE, LAMBERT'S CASTLE, MARSHWOOD AND RACEDOWN

Chapter V

UPLYME TO HUNTER'S LODGE, LAMBERT'S CASTLE, MARSHWOOD AND RACEDOWN

COLWAY Manor, where Prince Maurice placed some of his men during the siege, building a fort in Colway meadow, is half a mile out of Lyme. In the old days it was Glastonbury property, and was possibly used as a *lazar*-house. There is a legend of an underground passage connecting the house with St. Michael's Church, though how much truth there is in this I know not. At one time the Henley family lived there "in great style," but now it has fallen far from its high estate. There is not, indeed, much to be seen; but it is an easy step aside if one is on the way, say, to Uplyme.

At Uplyme, of course, you are in Devon, though, as already mentioned, no sensational change corresponds with the political. It is a pretty scattered village, with some fine chestnut trees. "The woody varieties of the cheerful village of Uplyme," is Jane Austen's apt characterisation.

One hopes the cheerfulness is not merely a mask. For a dark legend is connected with the place. First of the inns you pass (or halt at) is called the *Black Dog*. Now, running hitherward from Lyme Regis, roughly parallel with the high road, is Black Dog Lane. It bears its name with reason. It is a place of dread, which the more cautious folk of the Lymes avoid o'nights. For a beast haunts it, a horrible and unnatural beast. I was told of a sturdy coastguardsman, not the sort of man to go fearfully in the dark, expectant of spooks. He saw a little dog, apparently just an ordinary little black dog, trotting towards him. But as it came nearer it seemed to grow larger. It grew huge. It grew enormous. It was a monster. It was a vast black cloud that towered above him, surrounded him. It rushed past him and was gone. That is why those who know keep clear of Black Dog Lane after dark.

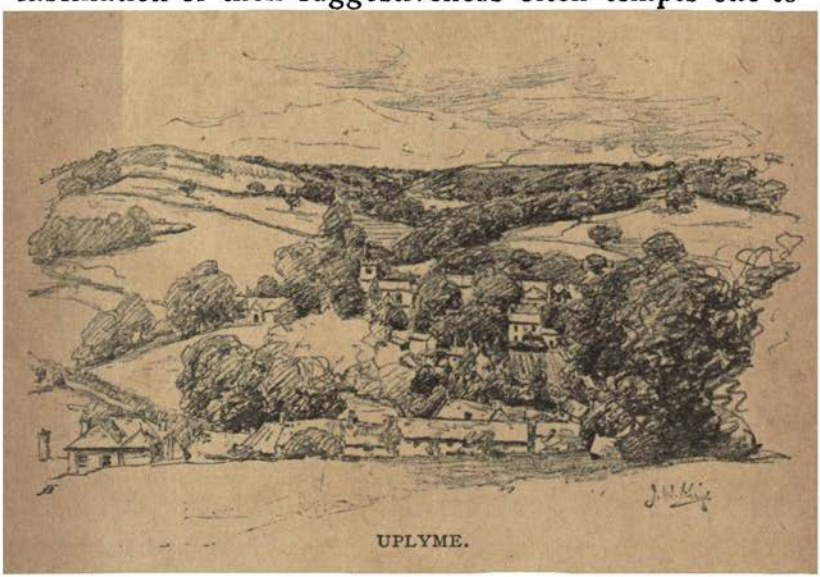
Uplyme Church, which is mainly in the perpendicular style, has been restored, and contains nothing very notable beyond a tablet over the south doorway in memory of a certain William Alfray, first lieutenant in the navy, who died 26th September, 1827, at the age of eighty. "His character," runs the inscription, "was never impeached either as a gentleman, an officer or seaman. Under divine providence he had the fortunate means of saving two of his Majesty's ships and a cutter at different times

UPLYME SMITHY.

from destruction by fire and water, with their crews, in all about 400 men. *Hic ejus nominis erat ultimus.*" Who, I wondered, was this aged seaman who had done his king such fortunate service; whose death had made one less in the roll of English names? I have since

learned a few more details from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which records the event of his decease, erroneously calling him John. He was the oldest lieutenant in the navy. That might have been expected. Further, "he was a man of a very singular turn of mind; he inspected his grave, which was dug at his request, three weeks

before his death." It is curious that one who had saved many lives should come, at the last, to take so morbid an interest in the details of his own sepulture. I have learned nothing more of Lieutenant Alfray. But he lives for me. Vaguely, perhaps, but with authentic breath; not mere galvanisation. And he interests me. If one delves at all among the details of history, one is continually coming across these biographical fragments, and the fascination of their suggestiveness often tempts one to



UPLYME.

leave the straight and ordained course. Truly, life is a persistent thing, when a dozen words can thus revive it.

Apart from Lieutenant Alfray, Uplyme Church is worth visiting, if only for the pretty lane in which it

HARCOMBE BOTTOM.

stands. This makes a pleasant change from the main road, and its hedges seem to contain finer blackberries than are to be found elsewhere in the neighbourhood. But that experience is, I suppose, conditioned by the season of one's presence there.

Eventually, though not so soon as one expects, the lane merges once more in the highway, which soon runs among a handful of cottages. This is the hamlet of Yawl.

My first impression was that Yawl, for all its tiny body, was a place with a soul. For there I met a little girl carrying a violin-case and a piece of music entitled (I think) *Bonbon*. But as I got nearer, I found that she was munching an apple, which decided me that Yawl was not over-spiritualised. As a matter of fact, it supplies the country around with soda-water

Ever since Uplyme I had been going uphill, and was by now a very respectable height above sea-level, or, as the ordnance maps say, "the assumed Mean Level of the Sea at Liverpool," where, one is given to understand, the ocean is not *quite* so full as elsewhere.

Here once more the balcony-like nature of the road is very striking. For a mile or more this one runs above the charming hollow known as Yawl Bottom, through which meander the upper waters of the familiar Buddle. Opposite lie the clad slopes of Woodhouse Hill, and further away to the north the greater height and barer

summit of Trinity Hill. These bottoms, green cups moulded among the hills, are characteristic of this neighbourhood. On the other side of the road, but hidden from view, is Rocombe Bottom, with Knoll Hill and Yawl Hill at either end; and divided from that by Whitty Hill is Harcombe Bottom, the fairest of them all. One can wander about these pleasant places at will, for there are many lanes and footpaths among their greeneries, and many hills worth the climbing: Shapwick Hill, Trinity Hill, Rhode Hill and the rest. Any of them offer to show you, at the price of a little breath, this varied and verdant country mapped beneath you. You will be a hard-hearted individual if you resist the temptation to stray a little, uphill or down. But in the end, if you be a true walker, the road will call you again. For footpaths are, after all, only for the amateur; lanes for lovers. The man who loves walking for its own sake will either go where paths are not, among the untrodden mountains, or else will tramp the high road, till the milestones blush to see themselves so spurned. So back again to the road to prove your mettle. Besides, if you want any lunch, you must push on to Hunter's Lodge. You will get none elsewhere hereabouts.

Hunter's Lodge was once, I believe, appropriately described by its name. Now it is just an inn where you can lunch excellently on bread and cheese and cyder. Its main significance is as a centre of roads. It must

do a thriving trade, quenching people's thirst while they make up their minds which way to go.

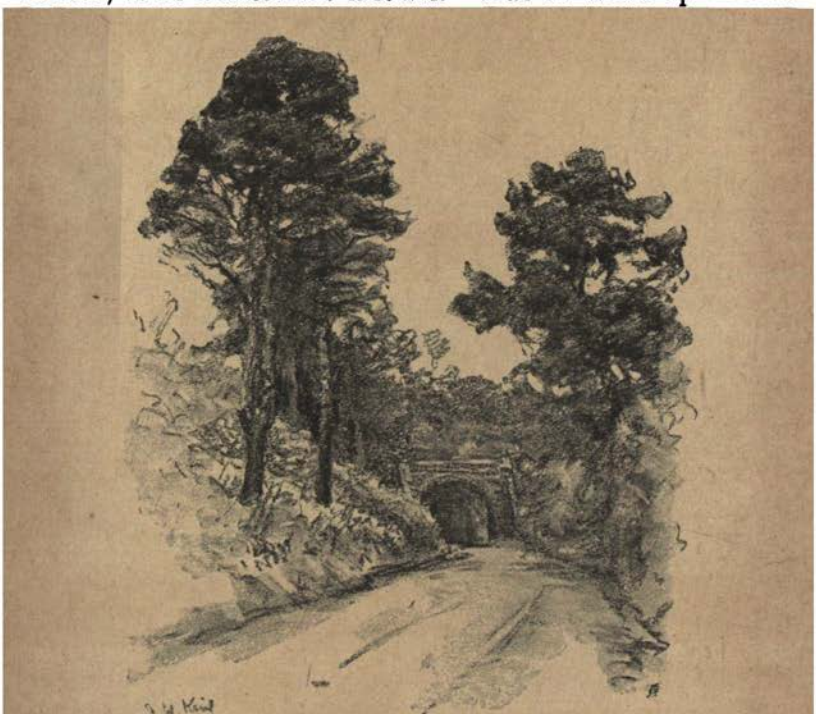
If you choose one road, the others will all put forth their charms. And the charm of the other road is

AT RHODE HILL.

always hard to resist. There are a few finer exercises in self-denial than walking. It is a condition of our poor, limited nature that we can only follow one road at a time. Yet however satisfied we may be with the road on which we actually are, all others seem to lead through fairyland to Paradise. At every fork and crossway we are called on to make choice and sacrifice. At Hunter's Lodge the flesh is most severely mortified. You must

choose one and you must lose three. And the promise of each is golden.

First of all there is the road to Uplyme. That, of course, is in a measure known. But to walk up a road



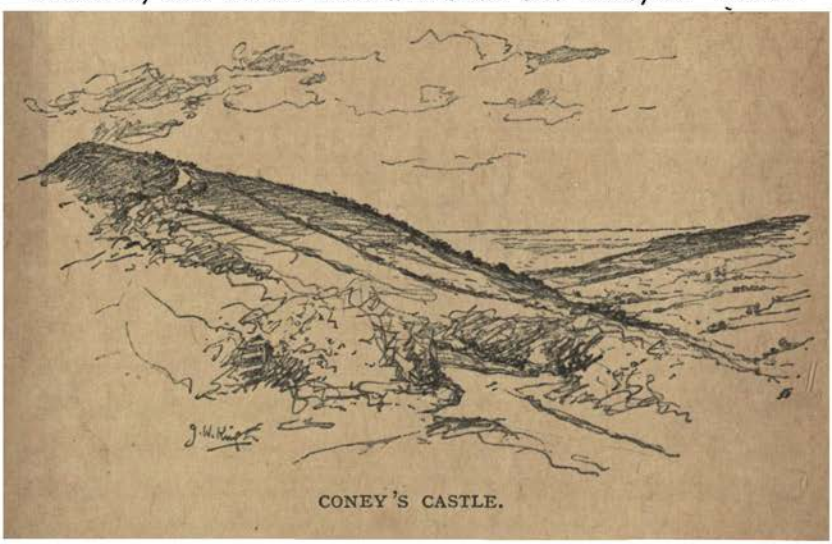
"WHERE ONE ROAD BURROWS UNDER ANOTHER."

is not the same as walking down it. You do not know what missed beauties the reversed aspect will yield. Besides, a road leading seaward has a peculiar virtue. Sooner or later it will show you the sea.

Of the other three, the road to Axminster, though ultimately attractive, is, perhaps, for the couple of miles that lead to the town, less interesting than its eastward rivals, the Crewkerne and Charmouth roads. The last named is as beautiful as a road can be. Before you have followed it for more than a few yards, however, you will once more be called upon to choose, and if, deserting the high road, you take the southern lane, you will find yourself in a network of dilemmas. For here you are right amongst the bottoms, which Knoll Hill would only let you guess at before. You can go by Rocombe Bottom to Uplyme, or, on the other side of Whitty Hill, through Harcombe Bottom and by Rhode Hill to the same insistent destination. Whichever your choice, it will be a good one, though no better than if you had kept to the road.

In the first place, for a good mile this road forms the boundary between Devon and Dorset, and it is pleasing to feel yourself lord of two shires; in the second place, it is a Roman road, and it is good to know yourself heir to a history like England's. In the third place—and this has the advantage of being appreciable even by those who are ignorant of the two former facts—its views are magnificent Once more you see the spire of Monkton Wyld among its trees. You look down into the richness of Harcombe Bottom. You pass Thistle Hill, where one road burrows under another, and finally you drop down into Charmouth, a desirable end.

But, for all that, I am for the Crewkerne road, though whether I shall get to far Crewkerne is another matter. But there is plenty of interest on the way. We are still marching with the border. (If you want to know how that is, you must look at a map). Fifteen years ago, however, this would not have been the case, for Hawk-



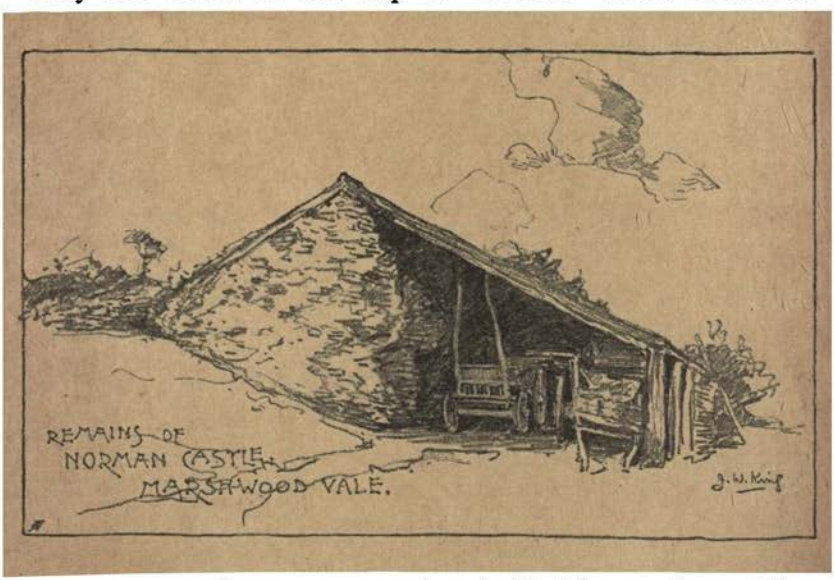
CONEY'S CASTLE.

church, which lies a mile north of the road, was then in Dorset.

The country through which this road passes is finely wooded. Bever Batch, Wyld Warren, Main Covert are some of the expressive names that distinguish the marshalled trees. The land falls away on both sides the way, stretching northward and southward in views of infinite variety. To catalogue were absurd;

while the impression is complicated by the wealth of detail.

Soon the great hill of Lambert's Castle looms ahead, higher than any we have yet faced; being, indeed, only sixty feet short of the top of Dorset. Who Lambert



was no one knows, nor who built his castle. The camp is supposed to have been of British origin, dug by the Durotriges, the old Celts whose stock is still so strong in Dorset. Then the Romans came, took the place and improved it for their own use. Their enduring handiwork is still to be seen. A mile to the south is Coney's Castle; Conig's or King's Castle, that is to say, where King Egbert encamped when he came

to fight the Danes on Charmouth sands. These are ancient tales, but Lambert's Castle, at least, is not yet dead. For the last two hundred years a fair has been held there, and horse-races.

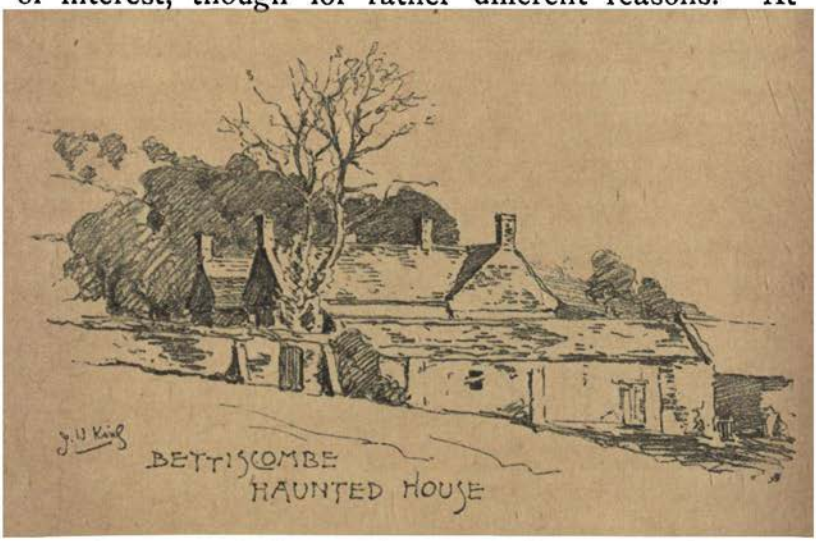
A mile further along the road is the village of Marshwood, where the lord of the manor still holds courts leet and baron as of yore. Once there was a castle of Norman build, down in the Marshwood Vale. But now it is only the fragment of a shell and the shadow of a moat. The lodge is a farmhouse, and the park has long been disparked. Nor is there any trace of that vineyard which the Domesday surveyors recorded as flourishing here. Its grapes have all been pressed and the wine drunk and the wine-cup broken these many years. The days are over when knights set their lances in rest on the lawns by Char stream, when the hunting-horn sounded in Prime Coppice and the lords of Marshwood drank the wine for which they had had to chaffer with no chapman from Gascony.

But back to the implacable road, and a mile forward to Birdsmoor Gate, where we are once more at the crossing of roads and the meeting of counties; also at the brink of much entertainment. Obviously we are not for Crewkerne to-night.

Indeed, there is a strong lure in altogether another direction. For the north-west road, though the narrowest of all, leads through Thorncombe to the

famous Ford Abbey itself. But that is a good many miles off. Let us take the cash in hand. It is sterling coin.

Half-a-mile north of Birdsmoor Gate is Racedown Farm, half-a-mile south is Bettiscombe, both places of interest, though for rather different reasons. At



Racedown we shall worship at a shrine, at Bettiscombe dabble in darkness. Dante started his pilgrimage in the Inferno and worked upwards. So to Bettiscombe first.

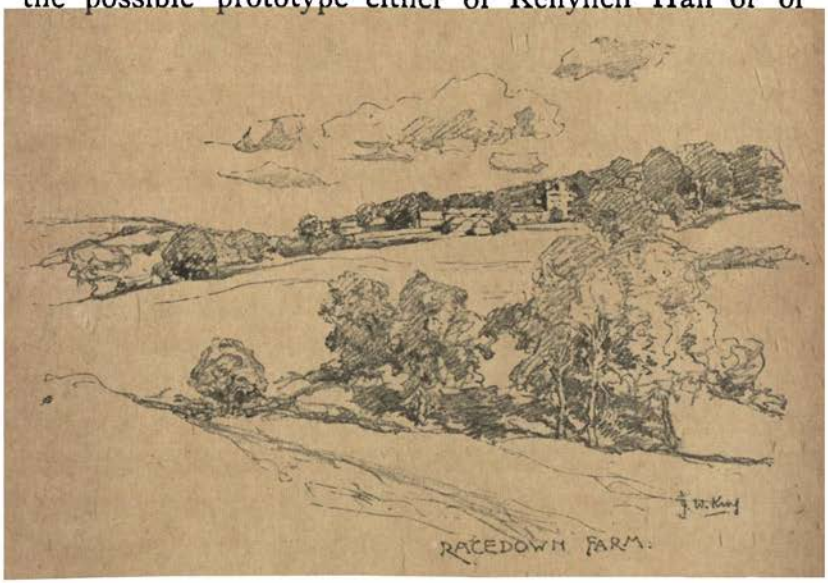
Not that the horrors of Bettiscombe are very horrible. But they have possibilities, and certainly need explaining. There is a skull kept at Bettiscombe Farm round which clings a mystery. It has a reputation for screaming whenever an attempt to bury it is made.

On one occasion someone temerariously tried to drown it. The air was filled with dismal shrieks until the thing was rescued and restored to the house, where for half a century it has lain undisturbed.

Whose the skull is, is the question. According to one story, it belonged to a heretic who was burnt at Dorchester. According to another, it was once on the broad shoulders of a negro who was murdered by his master, by some said to have been a Roman Catholic priest and by others a member of the Pinney family who once owned Bettiscombe. Experts, I am told, have pronounced it of an African type. It is certainly the skull of a giant. But there are those who deny that it ever screamed at all, saying that if it is carried out of the house, the building is shaken as though by an earthquake, and he who laid hands on the skull dies within the year. It is kept in an old hat-box in a loft, and you are taken to it up dark stairways, where a lantern is needed for guidance.

Apart from this treasure, Bettiscombe Farm is well worth seeing, as a fair specimen of the way they built manor houses in the days of Queen Anne. Outside it has all the dignity of sound architecture; inside the walls are covered with good panelling. Also there is a spacious yet very secret hiding-place, occupying the height of the house and entered from the attic of the skull.

But, after all, it is with rather a vulgar sort of curiosity about the screaming skull that one visits Bettiscombe. At Racedown, on the other hand, one's interest will have at least a tinge of reverence. For, besides being the possible prototype either of Kellynch Hall or of



Upper Cross in *Persuasion*, this was the first home, in their adult years, of Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy. It was lent them by a friend, Mr. Pinney of Bristol, and they spent two pleasant years here, making poetry and digging. Wordsworth "handles the spade with great dexterity," wrote Dorothy to a friend. He also wrote his tragedy, *The Borderers*, at Racedown, and made some not very happy excursions into satire.

Then Coleridge came "leaping over a gate and bounding down the pathless field" and carried them off to Alfoxden and the preparation of the poetic revolution. But Racedown remained to Dorothy, at any rate, "the place dearest to my recollections upon the whole surface of the island." The tradition long survived among the peasants of the neighbourhood that the farmhouse had been the scene of strange and unhallowed traffic on the part of the two poets. Their occult experiments were to result in the *Lyrical Ballads*.

"We have hills which, seen from a distance, almost take the character of mountains," wrote Dorothy Wordsworth. She referred, of course, to those Dorset giants, Pilsdon Pen and Lewesdon Hill, the former of which, and the highest, lies right over Racedown. The road to Broadwindsor will give you a nearer view of both these hills, with which, if you have followed my wanderings, you have already a distant acquaintance. Pilsdon, though it cannot take rank among the mountains, is without rival in the land within its ken. In the eighteenth century, which ascended so seldom from its trim plains, it would easily have earned the prouder title. On its summit are the triple entrenchments of a great camp, where as on Lambert's Castle, the Romans improved what the Britons had made.

The gorse-clad slopes of Lewesdon, whose crest

rises a mile to the west and but twenty feet lower than its brother's, inspired the Reverend William Crowe, a former rector of Stoke Abbott, to write a poem which ran through three editions during the author's lifetime and won the praises of Samuel Rogers. And, indeed, it is very respectable descriptive blank-verse; for those who like such.

Seamen on familiar terms with these pre-eminent landmarks call the two hills the Cow and the Calf, from some far-fetched analogy in their combined forms; and there is a local proverb which runs, "As much akin as Lewesdon Hill to Pilsdon Pen," which, says old Thomas Fuller, "means no kin at all."

Fuller, author of the immortal *Worthies of England*, could speak with authority of the lore of this corner of the world, for Broadwindsor was his first living, where he stayed until he tired of country life and longed for a hand in what was going forward in London. So he went to town, where his preaching was so liked that he was appointed lecturer of the Savoy. And there he stayed until the Civil War hurried him to the King at Oxford. He does not seem to have seen much more of Broadwindsor. Coming down after the Restoration, he was so pleased with a sermon he heard delivered by the man whom the roundheads had sent to supersede him that he left him in possession. This eloquent preacher was, however, ejected in the following year, which was

also the year of his predecessor's death. The pulpit from which Thomas Fuller preached is still in Broadwindsor church, an old structure which has undergone mid-Victorian restoration.

Of Charles II.'s breathless visit to Broadwindsor something has already been said. His enemies were hot after him. Pilsdon, two miles from Broadwindsor and a mile south of the Pen, was a natural mark of their zealous seeking. For it was the seat of a Wyndham, Sir Hugh, the uncle of the King's host at Trent. Twice, then, in the day came parties of rude roundheads thither to look for the fugitive; locking old Sir Hugh, his lady and his daughters, into their own hall, grossly insulting a young girl on the alleged suspicion that she was Charles disguised.

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AXMINSTER, KILMINGTON AND THE AXE VALLEY

Chapter VI

AXMINSTER, KILMINGTON AND THE AXE VALLEY

EVERYONE, I suppose—every idealist, at any rate—has a sort of hankering expectation of finding the streets of Axminster paved with carpets, just as one imagines Arras to be hung with tapestries or Brussels decked in lace and verdant with its cabbage gardens. But for such high hopes disappointment bitter as Dick Whittington's is the guerdon. It seems that no carpets have been made there since 1835, and that the whole period of their manufacture was but eighty years. One may find some consolation, however, in reflection that something very like romance tinged the origin of the famous industry. Thomas Whitty, an Axminster clothier, having seen in London a Turkey carpet, " ornamented with large figures and without a seam," was seized with a desire to emulate the wonderful achievement. He had little knowledge of weaving, but that did not daunt him, and one morning he woke up fully convinced that he would succeed. Eventually he did actually produce a small piece of carpet, which London experts proclaimed equal to that of

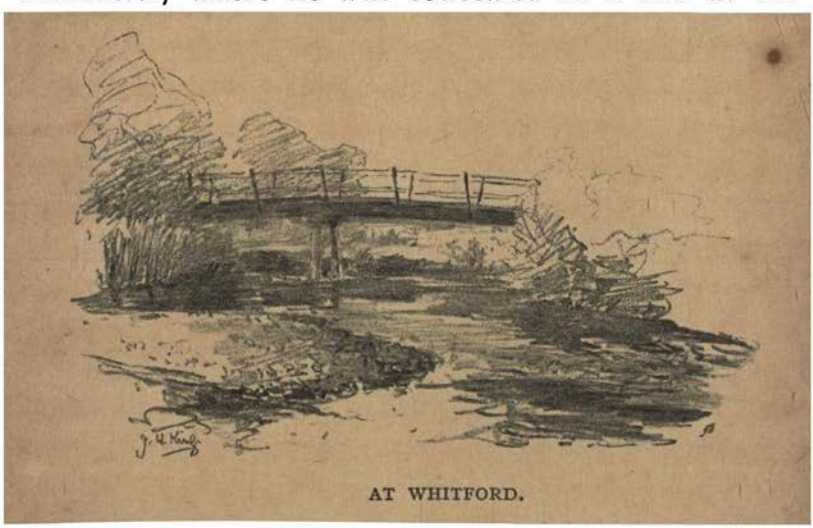
Turkish make. He persevered with his enterprise and gave Axminster its fame. It was considered an ill day for the town when his grandson abandoned the business.

Early last century a series of fires destroyed much of Axminster, and to-day there is little in the town to touch the imagination. Its chief attraction, I believe, is for anglers. It has a church and a history, however, which are both of some interest; and if the town itself is unattractive, its situation is beautiful, and there are all sorts of pleasant things in its neighbourhood.

There is Weycroft, for instance, a mile north on the Chard road, which still keeps the remains of the old castellated manor house of the Brookes, who were once lords of it. The Roman fosseway crossed the Axe at Weycroft Bridge, and it is probable that a small Roman garrison was quartered here. Beyond Weycroft again is Coaxdon Hall, where, indeed, we are in Chardstock parish, though still nearer to Axminster than to Chardstock. In this house, now but a fragment of its former self, was born and brought up Sir Simonds D'Ewes, antiquary and staunch Puritan, whose life exactly covered the reigns of the first two Stuart kings of England. There is a story also that this was one of the places whither the second Charles came after Worcester fight, and that Mrs. Cogan, the lady of the house hid him from his pursuers under the ample shelter of her hooped petticoats.

THE AXE VALLEY, FROM COLYFORD BRIDGE.

The name of Cogan of Coaxdon is connected with another narrow escape. After Sedgemoor a warrant was issued against Mr. Robert Cogan who, it is said, had entertained the Duke of Monmouth at Coaxdon Hall during the march to Taunton. Mr. Cogan fled to Axminster, where he was concealed in a bed at the



AT WHITFORD.

Green Dragon by the landlady's daughter, whom he afterwards married and brought home to Coaxdon Hall. Certainly the place does not lack romance.

No more—if only for the high and chivalrous names of its ancient lords Pomeroy, Mohun and Ralegh—does Smallridge, a bare half mile from Coaxdon as the crow flies, where there was once "a sweet and delightful seat" of which "there remains not so much as any

ruins to testify the being of an eminent house in that place." At Smallridge we are well on the way to Membury, where the roundheads got the worst of a skirmish in 1645, but which is mainly remarkable for its curiously shaped earthworks.

Thence it would be pleasant to wander on the green banks of the Yarty, but my original intention when I got to Axminster was to look at the church and then make my way southward. I suppose it was my disappointment at finding no carpets that drove me thus out of my way. So back to Axminster as fast as may be over a road which passes farms the charms whereof are epitomised in their names, Green Down and Sisterhood, Uphay and Lower Westhay. I still regret the Yarty, but I shall meet it again presently.

Axminster church, which is mainly perpendicular with some Norman work surviving, notably in the doorway now (though not always) in the south aisle, stands dominant in an open place in the centre of the town. To me, who have already confessed my culpable coldness to styles and such matters, the most interesting things in it are the two effigies in the chancel which have been ascribed respectively to Alice de Mohun and Gervase de Prestaller. Alice de Mohun, as sister and heir of William Briwere and wife of Reynold de Mohun, carried the manor of Axminster from one proud family to another. Gervase de Prestaller was the first vicar of Axminster

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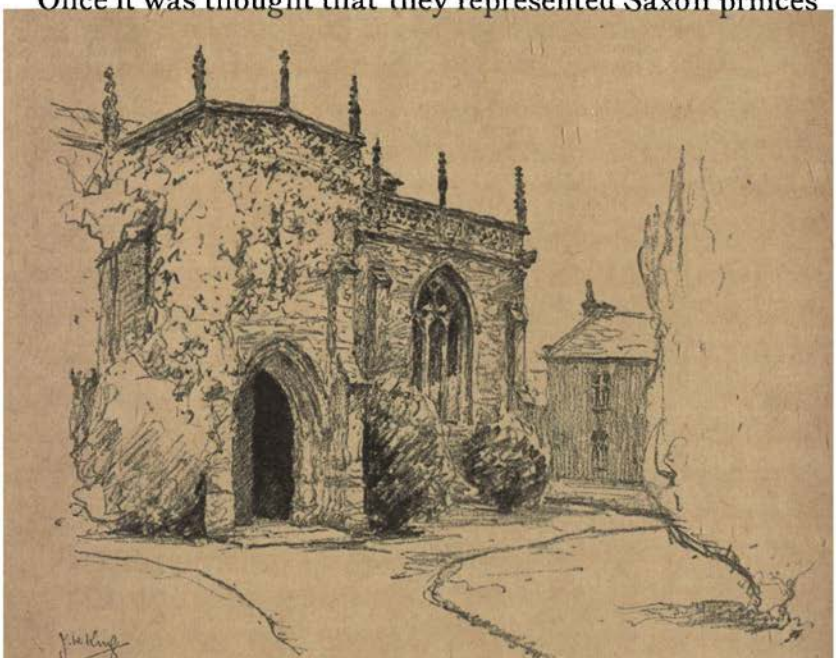
AXMINSTER.

whose name has been recorded. So both these old marbles portray people of at least local importance. Once it was thought that they represented Saxon princes



AXMINSTER CHURCH.

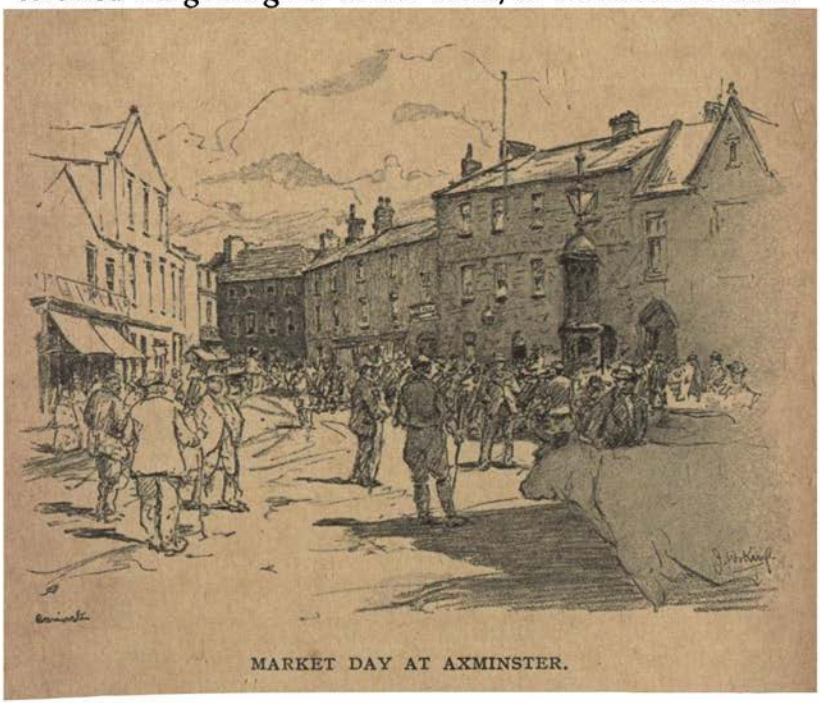
slain in the battle of Brunenburgh. The spurious interest so created was quite unnecessary. Alice and Gervase are good enough for us. As has been said, Axminster church is "remarkably bare of imposing monuments," but there is one that is almost bound to attract your attention. In the west wall of the church there is a curious bust of a woman, her hair dressed, it seemed to me,

in a seventeenth century fashion. There is no inscription to throw light on the lady's identity, about which, in consequence, I grew exceedingly curious. Nor have I, by subsequent inquiry, contrived to discover it; unless, indeed, she be the Ann Bazly who died in 1643 and is commemorated on the floor of the church. For the rest, there is a curious old painting of the Last Supper, and the piscina and sedilia in the chancel are of interest. But the restorers of 1800 have done their work. Outside there is a churchyard which went far to upset my opinion of the natural cheerfulness of such places. But this is explicable by the fact that for the last fifty years the Axminster dead have been buried in a new cemetery half a mile out of the town.

I am not the only person who has found Axminster on the whole a dull place. My illustrious predecessor, Cosmo de Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, who was here in 1669, wrote that "it contains nothing remarkable except the parish church." The description still holds good; though his statement that "Axminster is a collection of two hundred houses, many of which are made of mud and thatched with straw," needs to-day some modification.

Axminster felt, in various degrees, the force of the displacements caused by the three Stuart pebbles which were thrown into the calm waters of Lyme in the seventeenth century. But its greatest importance belonged

to a far remoter period. In British, Roman and Saxon days alike it was no mean city. It may at one time have been a residence of kings; and that it was strongly fortified the great girth of the walls, of which the remains



MARKET DAY AT AXMINSTER.

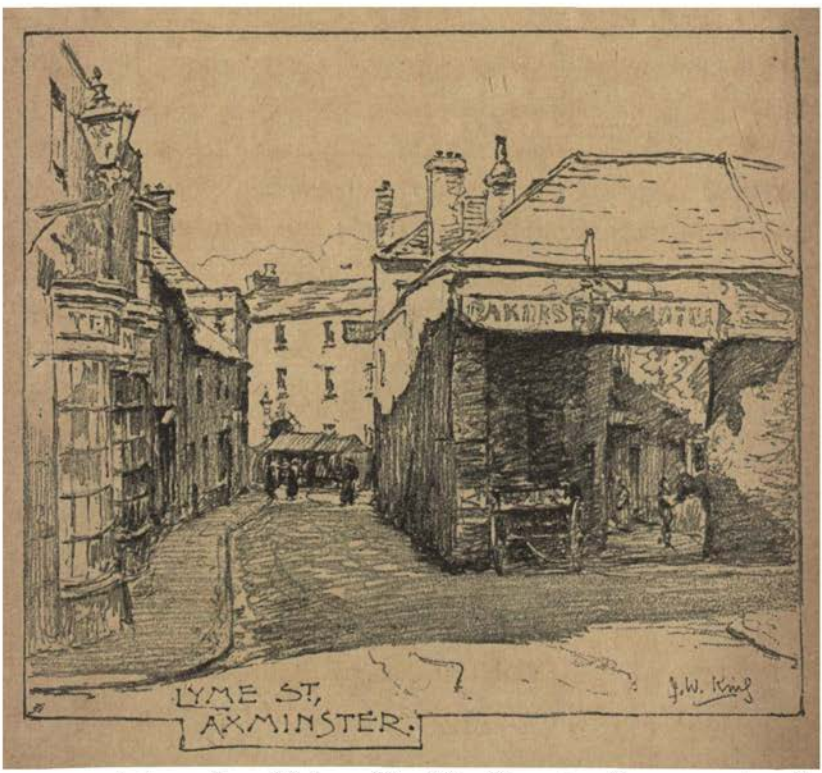
have from time to time been discovered, leaves no room to doubt.

When writing of pre-conquest times, or of a hundred odd years after Senlac for that matter, the historian is nearly always bound to match every fact with at least one conjecture. It is only thus that he can patch up

a coherent story. But conjectures vary in probability. Some of them gain the solitary support of their makers. Others meet with so universal an acceptance as to take on almost the moral value of facts.

Precisely where, in this respect, stands the theory that Axminster was the site of the battle of Brunenburgh it is not very easy to determine. The great fight in which Athelstan defeated Anlaf the Dane, and which is famous as the theme of the earliest of English war-songs, has itself become a battle-ground of controversy. Many historians contend that the fight must have taken place in the north, but it is not only local enthusiasts who would give Axminster the glory. This is no place for going deeply into such questions—barren to some, the very breath of life to others—but it is certain that there was, about that period, a great fight fought near Axminster; and one striking point may here be mentioned, because whatever it is worth (and that seems to me to be a good deal) it appeals to the imagination. This is what, more than half-a-century ago, was found by Mr. G. P. R. Pulman, whose *Book of the Axe* is a bigger book and a wiser than mine and contains, moreover, all the scientific arguments to prove that the fight at Axminster was Brunenburgh indeed. "Nearly a thousand years have passed, and yet to this day there is hardly a native child, from Axminster to the sea, who does not prattle about *Warlake* and its once 'running with blood'

—hardly a full-grown native man who would not confess, if he could forget the 'weakness' of such a confession, that he feels an involuntary thrill of horror, and is im-



pressed, in spite of himself, with all sorts of supernatural fancies while crossing the 'lake' by night at Kingsfield, on the turnpike road from Axminster to Musbury. The still but impressive voice of tradition is indeed no trifling feature in favour of the Valley of the Axe as the

scene of this famous battle." Names like Warlake and Kingsfield and Battleford do not get attached to places without a cause.

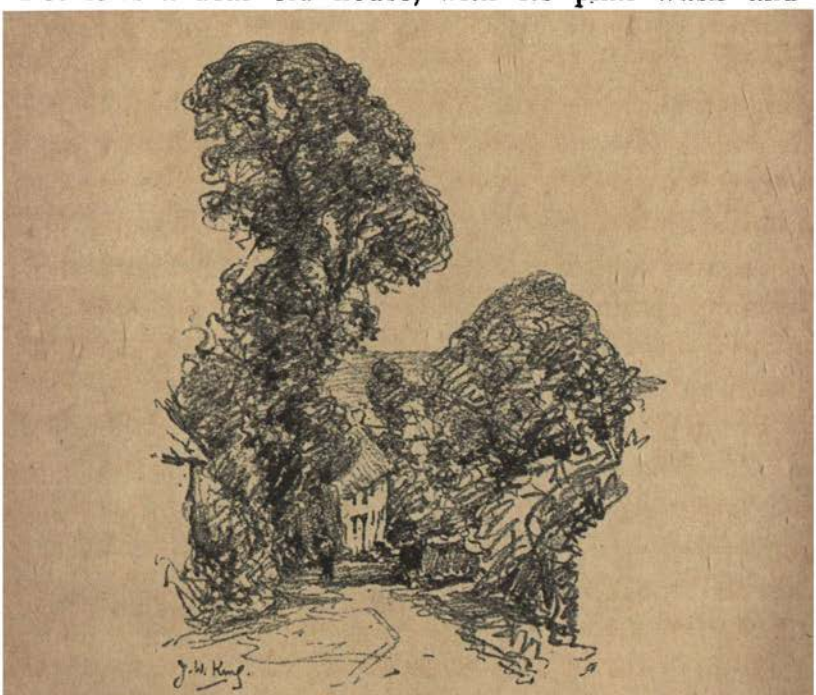
But, it may be urged, if it is established that there was as a matter of fact a great battle fought near our town, what does it matter whether it were or were not the battle which is known to posterity as Brunenburgh? It matters for the poem's sake. There is no historical event so great that it is not the greater for a good song made in its celebration. And *Brunenburgh*, though not a *Chanson de Roland*, is undoubtedly a good song, with a ring and a swing of its own. Tennyson, who himself had the gift of battle-song in such plenitude, put it worthily into English.

But *allons!* as Walt Whitman would say.

The broadest of the roads from the church leads south-westerly, over the railway, then over the Axe, and then, half-a-mile or so further on—if one has resisted the temptation of the Membury road—over the Yarty, up whose valley the glimpse is charming. It is not far from here that Axe and Yarty meet.

Once over the tributary stream, the road goes uphill until, at a crossway, the first indication of Kilmington is found. This is an inn very aptly called the *Old Inn.* Now there are plenty of old inns in this country, but many of them, after a fashion that strikes one as unseemly and kittenish, masquerade under the desig-

nation of *New Inn*. No such levity dishonours the old inn at Kilmington. It is perfectly candid about its age, of which, in truth, it has no reason to be ashamed. For it is a dear old house, with its pink wash and



IN KILMINGTON.

thatch, standing there opposite the orchard which, when I saw it, was lit up with the fairy lamps of reddening apples.

It is at this point that the Kilmington way takes a

sharp turn to the left, bringing one almost immediately to the parish church. Here the restorers have been at work even more earnestly than in the neighbouring churches, and only the tower—a fine square tower with an octagonal turret at one corner—is of any antiquity. In Mr. Pulman's scornful words, "one generation of churchwarden-architects had left evidence of their handiwork in mutilated windows; another in new doors, stuck anywhere; all vied with each other in producing an architectural wreck and mutilation." The latest restoration, however, improved matters considerably; and if one cares for armoury, it is certainly worth while to go into the church to see the window in the south transept, where the arms of the Tuckers (great people here) are repeated with the impalements of eight generations. It is a fine pomp of heraldry, and I doubt if a better piece of modern glass could be found in a day's march. Certainly I found none.

Brunenburgh, which is as persistent in this neighbourhood as Charles II. or Monmouth nearer Lyme, crops up again in Kilmington churchyard, where an ancient yew tree marks another supposed burial place of heroes.

But Kilmington has no need of meretricious allurements. Its authentic charms are sufficient. Its branching streets, its old cottages with their bright gardens, the clear waters of its streamlet, all these go to the

making of a gem among villages, a place where one could linger long were it not for the call of the road and the restlessness bred thereof. And just here the road calls with particular allure. For Shute lies beyond, and of Shute we have heard much. The most direct way from Kilmington to Shute is to take the southern prong of the fork into which the village street is divided. I imagine it would be a sufficiently delightful walk, running along the side of Shute Hill and skirting the grounds of the new Shute House. But he who keeps to the other road has many advantages. First, he will pass through a quaint piece of village which he would otherwise have missed. Secondly, he will lose his way: at least I did, but then I was working on a theory which called into play a very defective bump of locality. Thirdly and lastly—having presumably found his hypothetically lost way—he will get to the top of Shute Hill. And that is worth while.

On this plan, then, I passed through the pleasant quarter of Kilmington where the smithy is, and at once found myself in a net of paths. Which of them led to the wooded ascent of the hill that lay straight in front of me was more than, for the moment, I could discover. Not that I minded very much. I was well enough pleased to be where I was. But still, I did want to get over the hill to Shute. And eventually, after some

subtle tacking, I found myself on what was obviously the right road.

At that moment I saw a hawk hovering and experienced the joy that only a perfect work of art can produce. Now I do not wish to be a bore, but I must here follow (only a little way) my train of thought. The joys we feel in the presence of natural beauty and in the presence of artistic beauty are quite different things. The one is ecstatic, unreasoning—nympholeptic, Panic. The other is calm and critical, a deliberate weighing in the balance and finding full measure. Students of nature, students of the laws of evolution in particular, are, I believe, much exercised as to how far the adaptations and developments of animals are unconscious and how far deliberate. Might I humbly suggest that this subjective test, the examination of the sensations that the inquirers feel in the presence of given phenomena, might be used with some hope of results. For all our sensations, however they may manifest themselves, are ultimately instinctive, and therefore reliable. Now the joy that one feels in witnessing that exquisite feat of the hawk is plainly æsthetic and not a natural joy. Might we not conclude, therefore, that hovering is an artistic and deliberate achievement and not merely a gift of nature passively received?

Possibly my reasoning is false, but at any rate I am

on the top of the hill, though it may be symbolical that I have all this time been getting into the wood instead of out of it.

And a beautiful hill and a beautiful wood they are. The combination is glorious. All the joy—a natural joy this—of being on a hill was added to the sense of wonder which always haunts woodland places. Joy and Wonder, the two who loved in fairyland and were the parents of Song. It is excusable, I think, that even I felt the urgency to sing on Shute Hill. Truth it is, at any rate, that I made a little song there which I give you for what it is worth.

> This is the very place for love.
> The trees are chamber-walls enough;
> Violets and primroses,
> Sweet couch and meet for lovers' bliss;
> Sunlit wings of butterflies,
> Candles for love's mysteries.
> Faint-heard voices of the sea
> Chant our epithalamy.

There it is; and if you consider that I was quite alone and that, the time being autumn, there were neither violets nor primroses nor butterflies, you will realise how little the true artist is dependent on facts. But if you can see precisely what bearing (if any) this has on my previous remarks about nature and art you have a clearer head than I.

It was, indeed, the last day of a St. Luke's summer

when I stood on Shute Hill. The place was populous with the footsteps of falling leaves. The goblins were out and busy. From the noise they made it must have been their market day. Suddenly I began to feel lonely. My joy had left me. For the fairies nowadays—embittered perhaps by a lengthening and losing war with the materialists—have become very unfriendly and unsociable. They let you hear but never see them. And if you stay too long in their territory they have a way of making you feel extremely out of place and uncomfortable. So I hurried down the path which led me straight into Shute.

Two things came upon me at once, the church and the historic old house. Both attracted me. The house because it was Shute House, and I had been long enough in Devon to know the importance of the name, which, indeed, is of more than local fame; the church—more particularly than other churches—because I knew I should find in it a commentary on the house. I took the commentary before the text, however, following the dead custom of putting the spiritual before the temporal.

Shute church, which, like Kilmington, is sentinelled by a yew tree, is a small cruciform building, perpendicular in the main, but with some beautiful early English arches supporting the tower. At Kilmington, you remember, the restorer had done his work thoroughly

SHUTE HILL PANORAMA.

but left a very presentable building in place of that which he had caused so utterly to disappear. Here he has done even better, and the inevitable mid-Victorian renovations have been carried out with as little detriment as well might be to the beauties of the old structure.

As I had expected, the church is full of memorials of the Poles, who have for so long been connected with the place. Of their predecessors, the Bonvilles, however, there is no sign. The earlier Poles are also absent. Them I found at Colyton. But on wall and window the names of those of the reigning house who died in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are scratched and painted in profusion. They died too late to be buried beneath those gaudy but attractive tombs that represent their predecessors at Colyton and the Drakes at Musbury. They belonged to a day when, the exuberance of the Renaissance over, bodily presentment had given place, except in the case of the greatest, to verbal encomium. The memory of one of these later baronets, has, however, been preserved by something more imposing than mural tablet and Latin epitaph or even stained glass window. This is Sir William Pole, once master of Queen Anne's household, who stands there larger than life, the glory of court costume and the dignity of the wand of office preserved forever (one hopes) in lucent white marble.

The name of Pole seems to dominate the country-

side from Shute to Colyton. The atmosphere of the vale of the Umborne is charged with it. Sometimes it appears as De la Pole, for the baronet who reigned towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the antiquarian spirit was ardent and uncritical, thus extended his terse and honourable patronymic. The change was both unnecessary and unwarranted. The Poles of Shute were in no way connected with the ancient Dukes of Suffolk; and their name was old enough and of sufficient renown to do without trappings from Wardour Street. Since the originator of the change, successive baronets have used their discretion in the matter, though most of them have adopted the new and higher sounding but less authentic style.

It is, however, a little premature to be talking of the Poles before one has disposed of the Bonvilles, the great medieval lords of Shute. And the Bonvilles themselves must give place, for the antiquity of their tenure, to the De Shutes and the Pynes, whose name survives in Combpyne. But these last are shadowy personages. The Bonvilles belong to full-blooded history.

They got Shute with an heiress of the Pynes about the reign of Edward I. They battened on heiresses, these Bonvilles, and waxed fat on the diet, like others of their kind. Those who sentimentalise about blue blood and deplore the decay of class feeling, as evidenced in the origin of contemporary peeresses, would probably

be surprised if they took the trouble to look at any feudal pedigree, to discover how much more heavily land and wealth weighed than blood in the matrimonial choices of the realistic lords of the middle ages. They were not sentimentalists; and I am pretty certain that there were few feudal barons who would not have jumped at the chance of marriage with an American pork king's daughter.

The most notable of the Bonvilles was William, christened at Shute in 1392, on which occasion the spectators were evidently impressed by the "three long torches burning and two silver basins with silver ewers of water" and the silver cup given by the godparents. He fought in France in the victorious years of Henry V., returned to England, inherited land in Somerset from a cousin, and passed the shrievalty of Devon, fought once more in France and was made seneschal of Aquitaine and was at last summoned to Parliament as Lord Bonville of Shute and appointed governor of Exeter Castle for life.

Bonville had a long and bloody feud with his neighbour Courtenay, Earl of Devon, which is mentioned in the Paston letters, but this was merged in the greater quarrel of the Roses. Bonville was for York, and was one of those who were given the charge of the captured king after Northampton. But after the second battle of Saint Albans he paid for the honour with the loss of his

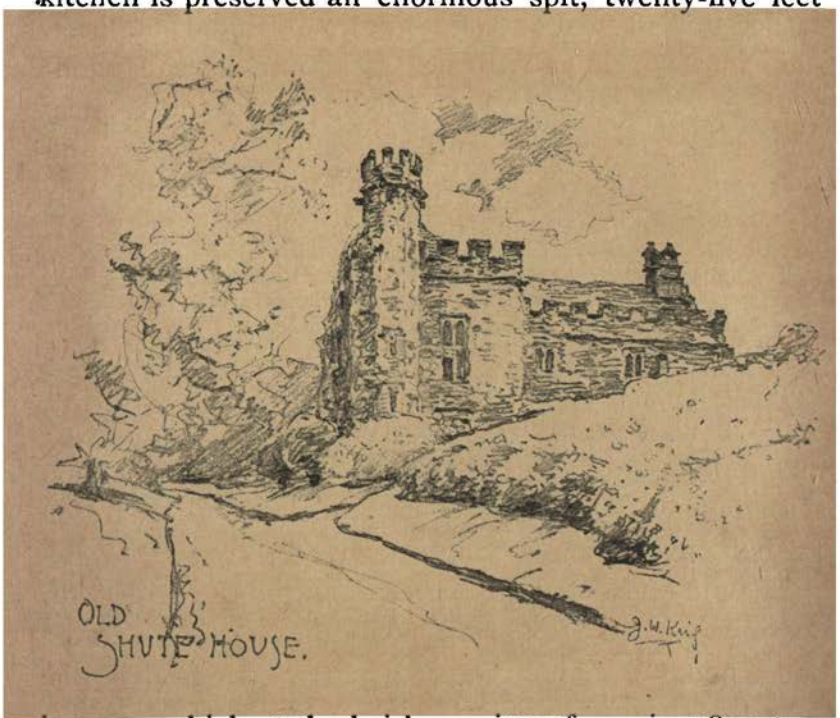
head. Henry himself would have spared him, but the extremists of the party would have nothing less than the old baron's life.

This was the end of the Bonvilles. Two months earlier Lord Bonville's son and grandson had both been slain in the field at Wakefield, and only a great-granddaughter, ten years old, was left to inherit the estates. Cicely Bonville, heiress of the baronies of Bonville and Harrington, married Sir Thomas Grey, afterwards Marquess of Dorset, the son of Queen Elizabeth Woodville. The grandson of this match, the Marquess Henry, being father of Lady Jane Grey, was attainted in 1553, and Shute was given by the Queen to Lord Petre. At some subsequent date a Petre leased it to the father of Sir William Pole, the antiquary, and from that day to this there have been Poles at Shute. They did not actually buy the place, however, until 1787, the date of the building of the new Shute House.

The old house must have been built by the Greys, or possibly by the Petres. Now only the castellated gate-house and one wing are left. The rest was used, in the days that loved not the Gothick, as material for the building on the hill. Dairy work is now done in the ancient place of the lords of Shute, and within one finds that simple dignity, as of a finer age, that still lingers in farm-houses here and there.

The great sight of the house is the kitchen, with its

immense fire-place, which, in a London slum, would be sufficient lodging for a numerous family. A modern fire looked very small and lonely in its broad lap. In this kitchen is preserved an enormous spit, twenty-five feet

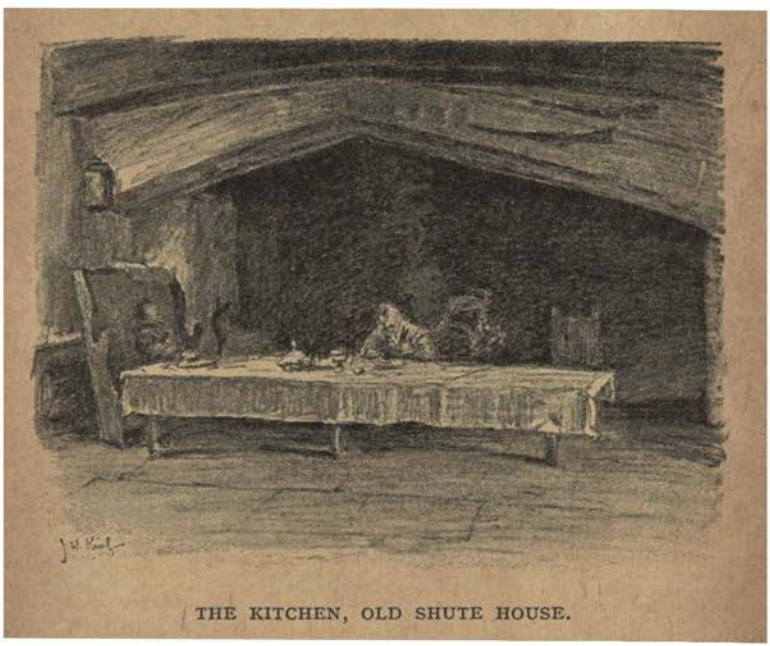


long, on which at the heir's coming-of-age in 1829 two fat oxen were roasted whole on what was afterwards known as Oxen Hill.

Immediately opposite the gatehouse is the entrance to the deer park, a shapely little hill studded with fine trees, an ideal place for its purpose, though if there are

deer there now I know not. The new house does not come in sight until one is round a bend of the road, when it is prominent above one on the left, very Georgian to see.

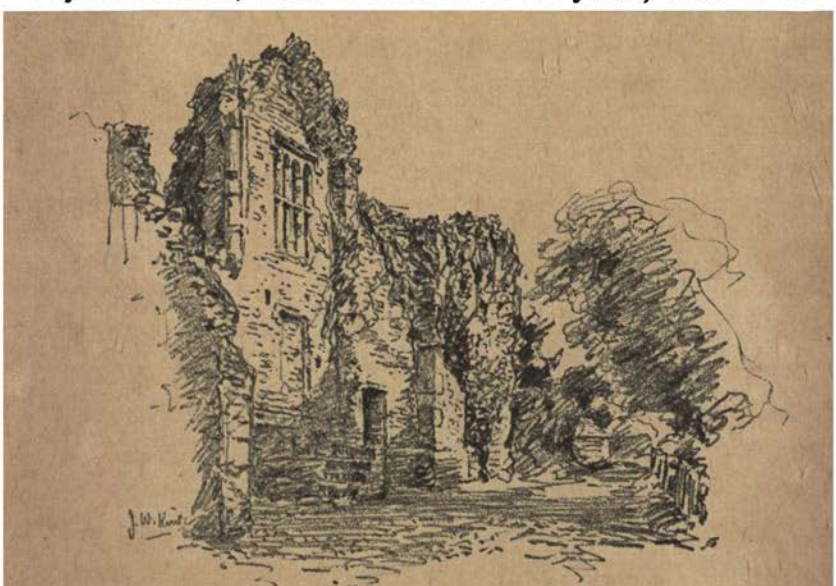
From Shute to Colyton direct is just two miles, to



THE KITCHEN, OLD SHUTE HOUSE.

which you may or may not think it worth while to add a third for the sake of going round by Whitford. If you do, you must keep straight on past Seaton Junction station instead of crossing the railway bridge. You will go under the railway a little further on, by an arch which bids fair in a few thousand years to become a

very fine stalactite cave. As a matter of fact, there is nothing particular to see at Whitford, though it may interest you to know that the manor, once part of the royal demesne, used to be held at the yearly rent of an



COLCOMBE CASTLE.

ounce of silk, and that "there is still the shadow of a fair held annually in September." At any rate, the road from Whitford to Colyton is a pretty one.

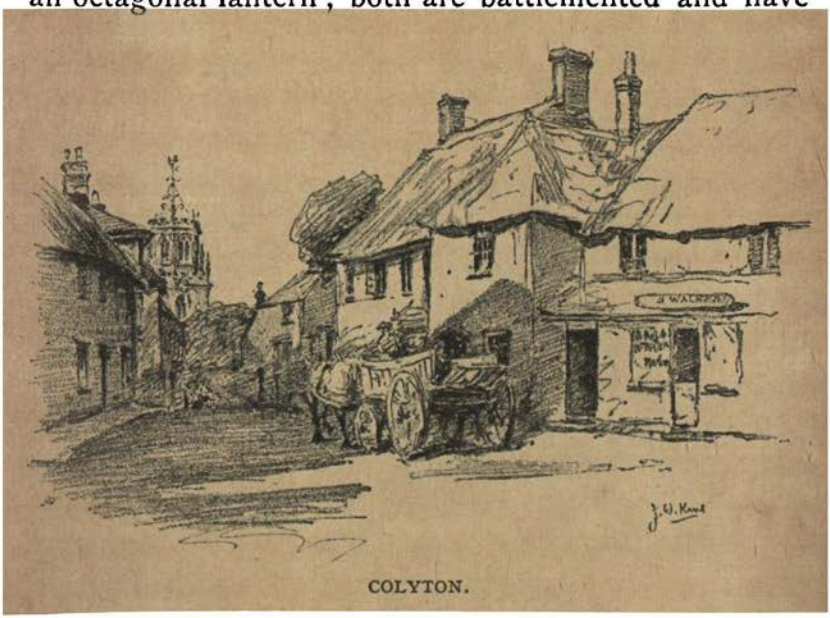
Just outside Colyton, between the road and the railway, and close to the Umborne Brook, stands all that is left of Colcombe Castle. It is not much: the shards of stately walls and some hewn window frames,

a great fire-place that almost rivals Shute's, and some carven wainscoting, and, a little way away, a well in an arched recess of Tudor workmanship. Yet the great house of Courtenay owned the place for a quarter of a millennium, and Sir William Pole, the historian of Devon, made it his home. He rebuilt the castle, but, as we have seen, his descendants preferred Shute. Colcombe fell into decay, suffered during the Civil War, and has now, like so many another house of its rank, become a farm-house. Three dogs of loose-limbed country breeds bounded out on me, with ferocious barkings, as I approached, and I thought that even in its fallen state the place was as well defended as in the days of the fighting Courtenays. But the beasts were called off and I was courteously shown what there is to see.

Colyton is much like any other market town of its size. Like Axminster and Bridport, its charms lie rather outside than within. Even in Leland's day it contained "no very notable thing" and frequent fires have done their work since then. It consists of a number of streets set at haphazard angles and dubbed with the obvious names. There is a High Street, a Fore Street and a Church Street; a North Street, an East Street, a West Street and a South Street. Some of these streets have better shops than others and some have no shops at all, but houses of any age. And in the midst, mothering the whole, stands the church. At

least it looks very motherly, as coming from Shute or Whitford you see the town spread out on the hill-side.

It is a striking church, for it has a tower of unusual structure and peculiar grace. On a square base is set an octagonal lantern; both are battlemented and have



COLYTON.

pinnacles at the angles; and the whole is harmonised by its perfectly adjusted proportions. The chancel is also beautiful, but the body of the church is of newer and clumsier build. The huge west window has just been restored and refilled with stained glass, which bears witness to the fact that, however far short of Renaissance or medieval standards we may fall, we can at any rate

do better work in the decorative arts than has been done for many a day. The tracery of the old window still stands in the churchyard, propped against the east wall of the church.

The south aisle of the chancel is the mausoleum of the earlier Poles of Shute. The monuments are behind a carven screen put up by Thomas Brerwode, who was vicar here in the difficult days of the Reformation. They are striking rather than beautiful, these works of the seventeenth century decadence, with their elaborate heraldry, their columns and capitals and cartouches, and their gaudily painted figures kneeling in prayer or reclining in final slumber. Most remarkable of all is the huge tomb where, under a pile of bedizened architecture, Sir John Pole, the first baronet, and his wife Elizabeth Howe lie back to back in life-sized and clumsily realistic effigy.

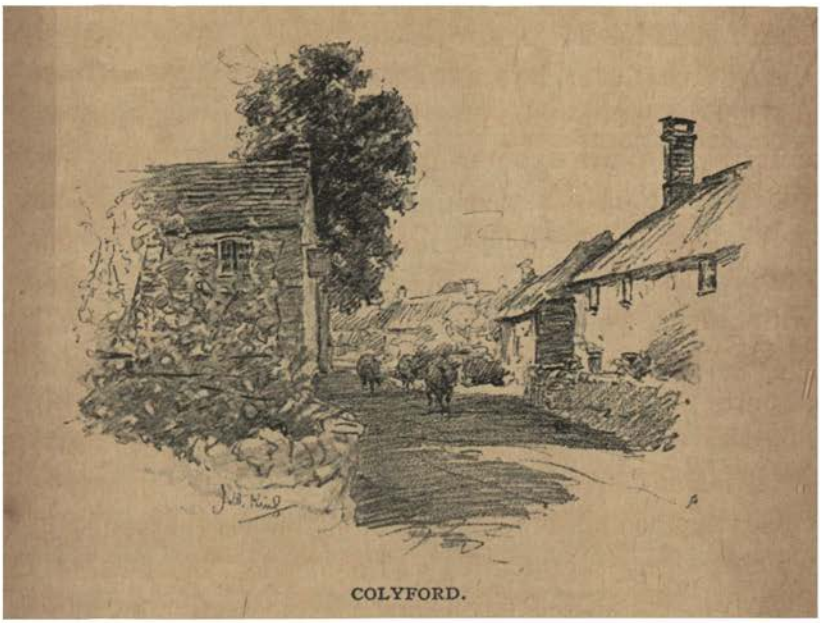
There are other interesting memorials in Colyton church, but everything else, of course, yields in attractiveness to the famous tomb of "Little Chokebone." Thus, at least, it is probable that the monument will ever be styled, for the fable has long been upheld by all the authority of a brass plate that here was buried Margaret, daughter of William Courtenay Earl of Devon and granddaughter of Edward IV., who was choked to death by a fishbone at Colcombe in 1512. Of course, this is a pathetic and therefore popular tale,

but science has shown it to be utterly impossible. In the first place, if the bone ever got into Margaret's throat it must have been safely extracted, for the lady grew up to marry Henry, Lord Herbert, and was alive fifteen years later. In the second place the impaled coat of arms is, of course, that of a married woman. In the third place these arms are of Courtenay and Beaufort (England with a border for difference) and not Courtenay and England, which would have been the coat of Margaret's parents and might conceivably have been placed on her tomb. In the fourth place, and lastly, these arms can only be those of Margaret Beaufort, John of Gaunt's granddaughter, who become the wife of Thomas Courtenay Earl of Devon. To this lady, therefore, who was great-niece of Richard II., cousin to Henry VI. and Edward IV. and great-aunt to Henry VII. the tomb may certainly be assigned.[1] Finally, by way of appendix, the small size of the tomb is no indication that it is a child's.

So much for poor little Chokebone. The tomb itself is of beautiful, delicate workmanship. But it has suffered. The colour is gone from the shields of arms. Heads and traceries have been broken. The Countess Margaret's own head disappeared long ago. She appears to have been given a new one eighty years

[1] See *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art*, xxxix., 144, *sqq.*

ago by the well-intentioned blunderers who put up the brass tablet. But that also disappeared, and quite recently the lady received her third headpiece. This was deliberately carven in the likeness of a child of five, and an acrimonious correspondence in the *Times*



COLYFORD.

resulted. The sculptor, as he called himself, or the monumental mason, as his antagonists called him, fared very poorly; but it must be confessed that the childish head, however incongruous, is a pretty piece of work, though as much cannot be said for those which he gave to the Virgin and her Child.

I must, by the way, to some extent qualify my quotation from Leland. When I made it I had for the moment forgotten two very interesting houses. One is the vicarage house, built in the sixteenth century by the Dr. Brerwode already mentioned, whose quaint motto *Meditatio totum, Peditatio totum*, and the date MCCCCCXIX. are still over the porch. The other is the "Great House," all that is left of the family residence of the Yonge family, where King Monmouth was entertained on the famous progress which he made five years before his other coming to the West.

A mile south of Colyton lies Colyford, the birthplace of Sir Thomas Gates, Governor of Virginia, who was with Somers when he found the Bermudas. Absurd as it may seem, the little place, a mere handful of houses, is a borough, though I am not certain whether it still boasts a mayor or not. It did a few years ago.

It was at Colyford that I thought I had made a discovery. I came across a chapel above the door of which a large ammonite was embedded in the wall. Clearly a symbol. Then it flashed across my mind that Moridunum was not two miles off. Could it be that, in this quiet corner, the paganism of those eternal Romans still lingered? Could this really be a temple where the worship of Jupiter Ammon was still maintained? I dared not read the writing on the notice-board. So to this day I am not certain.

AN AXMOUTH CHIMNEY SUNDIAL.

AXMINSTER TO MUSBURY, COMBPYNE, THE LANDSLIP AND AXMOUTH

Chapter VII

AXMINSTER TO MUSBURY, COMBPYNE, THE LANDSLIP AND AXMOUTH

AXMINSTER is like the heart of a star, the rays whereof spread out in all directions. And there is not one of these rays or roads which is without its allure. If you stayed in Axminster for a week you would have one for each day. On Sunday, being a day for contemplation, you might go out past the farms and up the peaceful vale of Yarty. Monday's walk would be to Weycroft and Coaxdon and on to Chardstock, as already described. On Tuesday (working from left to right) you would go due east over Stammery Hill to Lambert's Castle and Marshwood: a splendid thing to do. Wednesday would take you to Hunter's Lodge where, I am afraid, you would have to make the difficult choice between Lyme and Charmouth. Thursday would be for Musbury and Axmouth; Friday for Colyton (where we have just been); and on Saturday you would pass Kilmington Old Inn on the westward way to Widworthy.

Let us pretend it is Thursday, for there is much to see on the Axmouth road. To begin with, it is the ancient Fosse Way, the road that carried the Romans

from Bath to Exeter and the west. It is the same road as we were on at Weycroft.

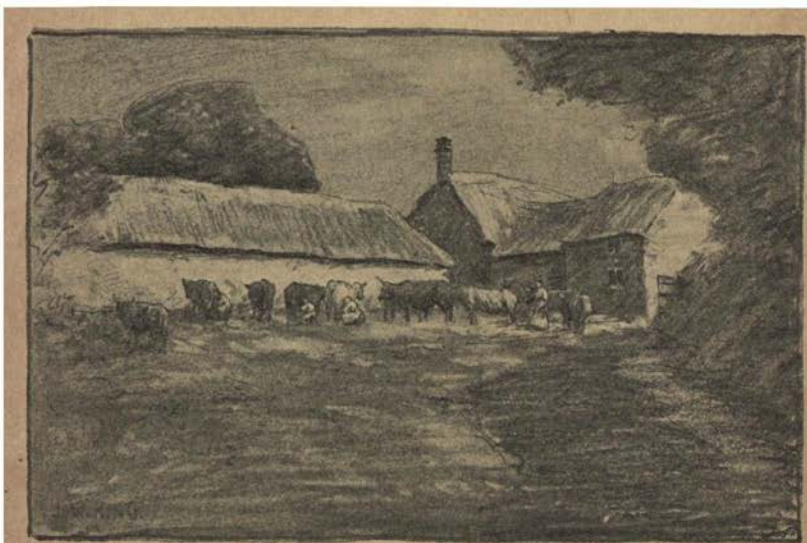
Roman, medieval and modern England are all exemplified in the few short miles between Axminster and Musbury. A mile out of the town, just where the road burrows under the railway, one comes to Abbey Gate, which, now a cottage, was once what its name denotes. For along the lane which passes under the first railway arch lies a group of farm buildings, where more modern work is mixed with what is obviously very ancient and must have been very fine. This is the ultimate condition of the stately Abbey of Newenham, founded in 1246 by Reynold de Mohun Earl of Somerset, who brought twelve monks and four lay brothers from Beaulieu to people his new house.

The foundation stone was laid in 1250 by Walter, the prior, but four years later a more magnificent ceremony took place, when Reynold de Mohun, accompanied by all the great men of the county, came in person to set the corner-stone in place. On this occasion the abbot and the whole convent threw themselves at the feet of their founder and begged him to make Newenham the place of his sepulture, to which he consented. Another person of importance to whom the abbey gave the final hospitality was Sir William de Bonville of Shute, grandfather of Lord Bonville the Yorkist.

This church of Mohun's foundation must have been a

IN COMBPYNE SMITHY.

splendid structure. It was two hundred and eighty feet long and one hundred and fifty-two feet across the transept. There were six altars besides the high altar and a peal of bells that sweetened the air for miles around. It seems that Newenham was a miniature Salisbury; and Salisbury, as everyone knows, is one of



NEWENHAM ABBEY FARM.

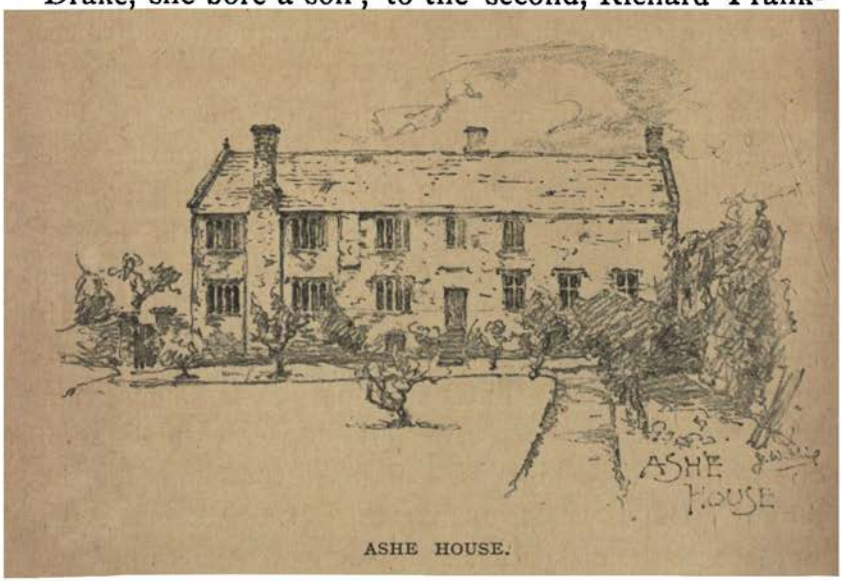
he most beautiful churches in this country. But Salisbury was a cathedral church, Newenham an abbey, so that while the one still holds erect its proud spire, which is the highest spire in England, the other is a place where pigs may feed. When Henry VII. came here in 1497 the house was at the height of its glory. Forty

years later, as one of the greater abbeys, it was surrendered to his son's commissioners. That was the end of Newenham. No second flower-time as the seat of some secular magnate was in store for it. Its pomp was gone for ever. The only incident to record in its post-Reformation history is the birth there of Prince, who wrote the *Worthies of Devon.*

Past Newenham we are in the Drake country. The name haunts one as that of Pole does on the other side of the Axe. An old house of theirs lies to the left of the road, another to the right. To get to Trill, the first of these, one leaves the Fosse Way for the Combpyne lane. It is a stony lane but a very pleasant one, quite worth following right into Combpyne, were it not that we are on another errand. There is in particular a copse that the lane skirts. To see it as I did, with the light of the setting sun behind it, is ample recompense for the stones. But if we go on like this, we shall miss Ashe and we shall miss Musbury, which are the things we came out chiefly to see.

At Trill itself, an old manor house which is now a farm, there is nothing in particular at which to look. Ashe, also a farmhouse, is more interesting. The chapel, or some of it, remains, though put to base and worldly uses, and there are also a kitchen and other rooms which the Drakes knew. Indeed, they know them still, it is said, haunting their ancient home in the darkness of the night.

It is scarcely surprising if they are reluctant to leave the place, seeing how long it was theirs. A certain Christian Billett, heiress of Ashe in the days of Agincourt, had two husbands. To the first of them, John Drake, she bore a son; to the second, Richard Frank-



ASHE HOUSE.

cheyney, another. When his parents were dead Frankcheyney's boy took possession of the manor. Young Drake, as child of the earlier marriage, naturally objected. So he took the matter to law, and, after lengthy proceedings, succeeded in disestablishing his half-brother. Frankcheyney retired from the scene, and thenceforward for more than three centuries the Drakes held Ashe.

They were very proud and jealous, these Drakes, and would brook no upstarts claiming their kinship. Even the man who immortalised their name must keep his distance. There was a terrible to-do at Elizabeth's court when Sir Bernard, head of his house and a captain of repute, boxed the ears of Sir Francis, that much greater captain, for having dared to make use of the family arms to which he had no claim. These arms were a red wyvern, and the Queen, in compensation for his smarting ear, gave the circumnavigator the honourable coat of a fesse wavy between the two pole stars (alluding to his exploits), and for crest a globe with a ship on it and a wyvern hung by his heels in the rigging. This would have been a shrewd blow for poor Sir Bernard, but, as it happens, there is probably not a shadow of truth in the whole story. The two seamen were very excellent friends, and when Sir Bernard died of fever, missing the Armada by two years, Sir Francis lost a good colleague and Elizabeth a good servant.

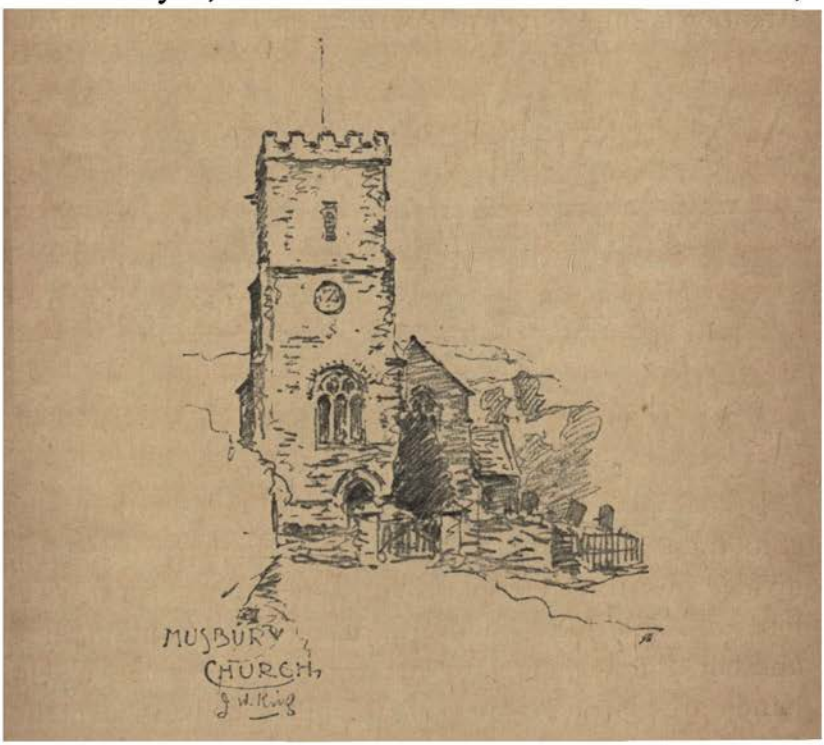
John Drake, grandson of this Sir Bernard, had as one of a dozen children a daughter Elizabeth. She became the wife of a Dorset knight, who bore the famous name of Winston Churchill. She became, moreover, the mother of a famous son. At Ashe House, whither she and her husband, an ardent royalist, had fled, she gave birth, in the summer of 1650, to a boy who was christened John after his grandfather. To-day the chief

glory of Ashe is that the great Duke of Marlborough was born there.

It cannot have been long after this fateful event (on which, it may almost be said, the destiny of Europe depended) that Ashe House was burnt to the ground. The place remained in ruins for several years, the family migrating to Trill, until Sir John Drake, who succeeded in 1669 to the baronetcy that had been bestowed on his father in Restoration year, set to work on a new house at Ashe. Prince has a word on the man and his house. The baronet was "a sober, serious, and prudent person," and, as for the house, he "enlarged and beautified it to a greater perfection than it was before; enclosed a park adjoining to the house with a good wall; made fish-ponds, walks, gardens well furnished with great variety of choice fruits, etc., so that it may vye, for beauty and delight, with most other seats in those parts."

Quantum mutatus ab illo! The Ashe of to-day makes no effort to vie with Ford Abbey or the new Shute, and the Drakes are only memories. Their line came to an end exactly half a century after the completion of the new house. Dame Anne, the widow of the last baronet, lived there half a century longer, and it was in Ashe chapel that Anne Speke, the only child of her second marriage, was mated with Lord North, that much abused statesman. After Dame Anne's death the Poles rented Ashe while their new house beyond the river was a-building.

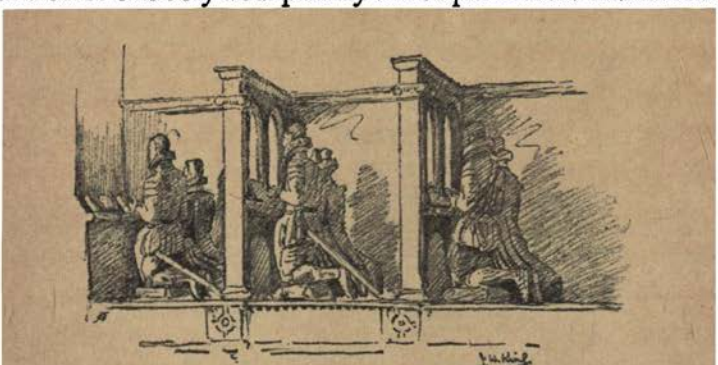
For concrete evidences of the ancient importance of the house of Drake we must take to the road again and get forward to Musbury. Half way is the little hamlet of Maidenhayne, whence a lane branches off to Nunford,



the alleged home of certain nuns, hypothetical sisters of the monks of Newenham.

Musbury, Courtenay property before the Reformation, Drake property after, lies low and pleasantly in the Axe valley. It is a pretty village, bright with gardens and

indescribably peaceful. The church stands at the eastern extremity, a little aloof, which is, of course, the wrong attitude for a church. But it has a low and massive tower, which inspires confidence. Inside one's attention is entirely usurped by the triple Drake monument.



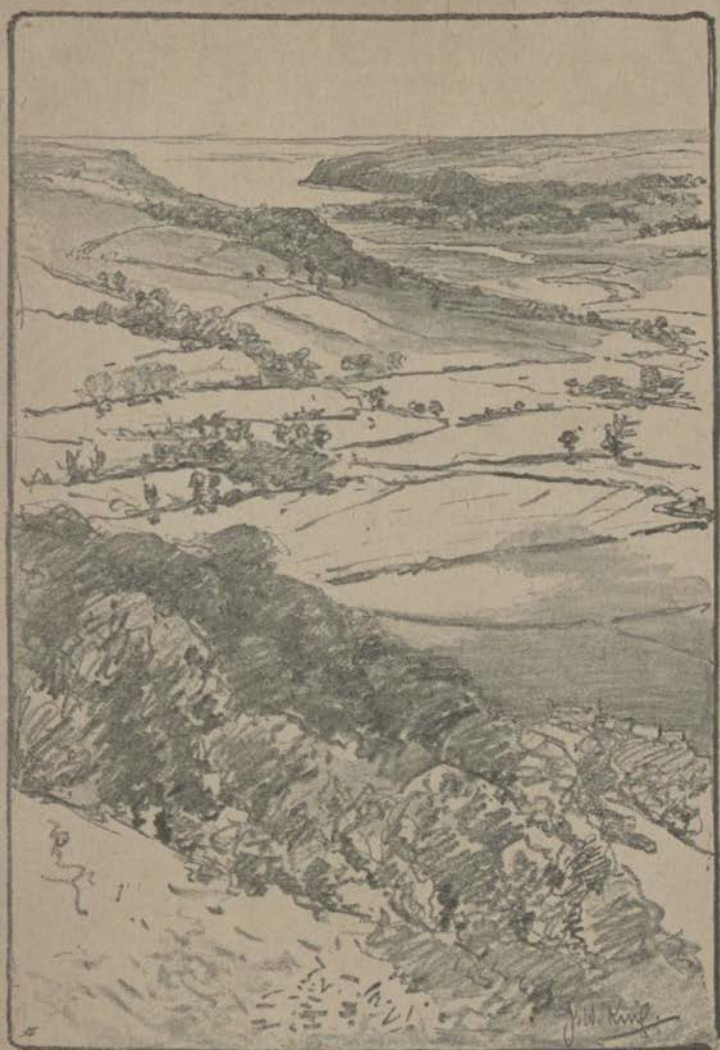
THE DRAKE MONUMENT.

It is a painted Renaissance tomb, of better workmanship than those at Colyton. On a high raised dais, divided into three compartments, kneel three successive lords of Ashe, John, Sir Bernard, the good captain, and another John, each with his wife by his side. Their hands are clasped in prayer (though the men kneel in armour) and open books are before them. Overhead and beneath each pair of figures is repeated the shield with the wyvern, the fiery beast which the bold Sir Francis, who "nor Devil nor Spaniard feared," is supposed to have hung topsy-turvy from his yard-arm.

Just outside the church a little pathway leads to Musbury Castle. No embattled home of feudal Drakes is this, but the kind of castle we have seen at Membury and by Marshwood. It is a prominent member of the line of fortifications which stretch northward from Axmouth and were probably thrown up by the Durotriges of Dorset to keep their land safe against the Damnonii of Devon. The works consist of a single line and a ditch, which follow the conformation of the hill, and there are strongly defended entrances at the northern and southern ends. Perhaps the information leaves you unmoved. Nevertheless, you must climb Musbury Hill for the view it gives. A few minutes ago, Musbury was your world. Now you are master of the Valley of the Axe.

Northward lies Axminster, with well-timbered Cloakham behind it, and, away in the beyond, the higher hills round Chard. Away to the north-west, across the river, past Shute and Widworthy, are glimpses of high Devon, beautiful, far-off, calling with irresistible voices. Southward the river winds in its broadening valley to Axmouth and the sea, and away across the marshy meadows which were once Seaton harbour Beer Head shows austerely white. . . . .

The road from Musbury to Axmouth runs down the valley, keeping within half-a-mile of the river. But we are for another road. I know that when I chose



LOOKING SEAWARD FROM MUSBURY.

AXMINSTER TO MUSBURY

Thursday's walk from Axminster I talked of Axmouth as the destination. But I have altered my mind. I intend to go by way of Combpyne and Rousdon to Lyme Regis.

To do that, one follows a delightful lane which circles half round Musbury Hill, passes the comfortable farmstead of Higher Bruckland and eventually runs into the north end of Combpyne.

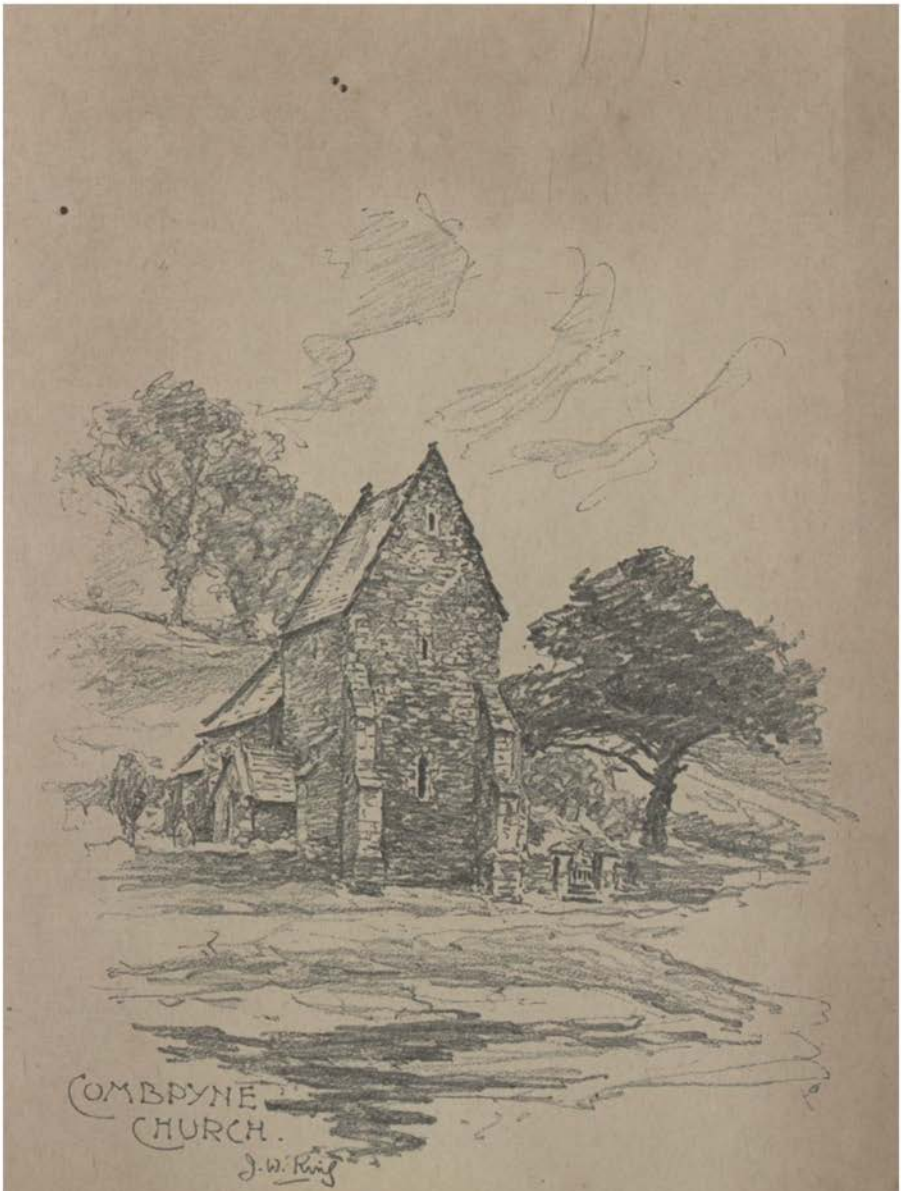
In the course of my wanderings I have come across many names which are both beautiful in themselves and truly symbolic of the places they denote. There is Charmouth, for instance, on which it is difficult not to play; fine medieval names like Wootton Fitzpaine and Chideock; sonorous names like Broadwindsor and —sonorous as a mass—the splendid Whitchurch Canonicorum. But I have found none more expressive than the pleasant name of Combpyne. Originally, of course, it was the combe where the men who bore the name of Pyne had their habitation. But it is not a place that one associates with manorial lords. One does not realise that it bears the same sort of name as Wootton Fitzpaine. If one did, one would be struck by the incongruity. For Combpyne seems part and parcel of nature, as impersonal and unhistoric. A place that is apparently timeless cannot have a history. And Combpyne, wedged in its hollow, magnificently unperturbed even by its own railway-station,

is extraordinarily ancient. There is not only nothing new about it, there is apparently nothing even new in comparison with other things. The little church, with its high-pitched roof, having neither tower nor steeple, shows few signs of the restoration which it has actually undergone. Characteristically, the communion plate in use there is among the oldest in England. There is not a cottage in the place the roof whereof is other than thatched. In fact the only youthful things I saw in Combpyne were a number of little black pigs strolling casually about the road. From their expressions I must have been the first stranger on whom they had ever set their young eyes.

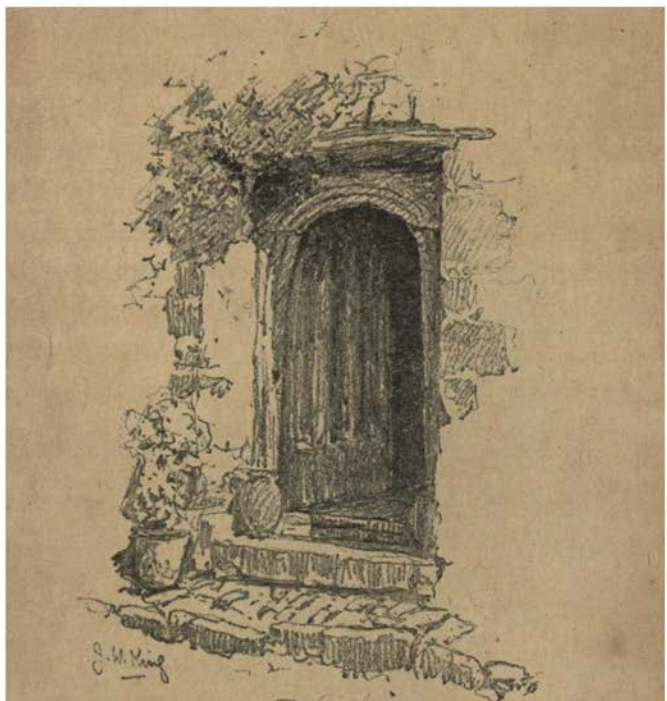
But black piglets are by no means peculiar to Combpyne. They swarm in every village. It has struck me, indeed, that if the Gaelic belief be well-founded and the world is one day to be devoured by a black pig, then the fatal monster is as likely to come out of this corner of Devon as out of Ireland itself.

If you want contrasts you cannot do better than walk the short and picturesque mile from Combpyne to Rousdon. Most places, whether huge town or tiny village, graduate gracefully from old to new. But Combpyne, as we have seen, is uncompromisingly old. And Rousdon is as uncompromisingly new.

Once it existed in an older form, and it even had an older name, Downralph. But all traces of its past


COMBPYNE
CHURCH.
J.W. King

have been swept away to make room for the spick-and-span, red-brick, intensely modern and intensely model village which has sprung up during the last forty



IN COMBPYNE.

years. This is the work of Sir Henry William Peek, who, having trafficked in the strange spices and subtle herbs and rich fruits of the east and west, having, in other words, made a fortune in the grocery trade, bought Rousdon and thus transformed it. The whole

of the land from the high road to the sea is his, or rather his heirs'. Half the parish or more is their demesne. This merchant prince—for men like these recall the days when commerce was a heroic thing, making us think of fleets as argosies and India as Ind—this Sir Henry William Peek, baronet, built the great house, which is a fine modern adaptation of the Elizabethan plan, being aided in his work by a cargo of Sicilian marble, which was wrecked (as it might be miraculously) on the rocks below. He built the church on his own grounds. He built the schools. In fact, he created Rousdon. The entire population was his and now owes fealty to his heirs, who exercise what appears to be a very benevolent despotism. For the

FARMHOUSE AT COMBPYNE, ONCE A CONVENT.

village looks happy and prosperous. It is undeniably neat and clean. At the beginning of a pilgrimage in search of the picturesque the sight of all this newness would probably depress one, or leave one, at least, very cold; but when one has spent days in a country whose

AT ROUSDON CHURCH.

charm lies mainly in its past, such a contrast is not by any means unwelcome.

From Rousdon into Lyme is about three miles along a fine, broad Roman road. There is also the way by the undercliff.

The best way to see that undercliff, however, and its famous young brother the Dowlands Landslip, is to tramp from Lyme to Axmouth along that untidy margin of England.

Tennyson, who was taken there by his host after he

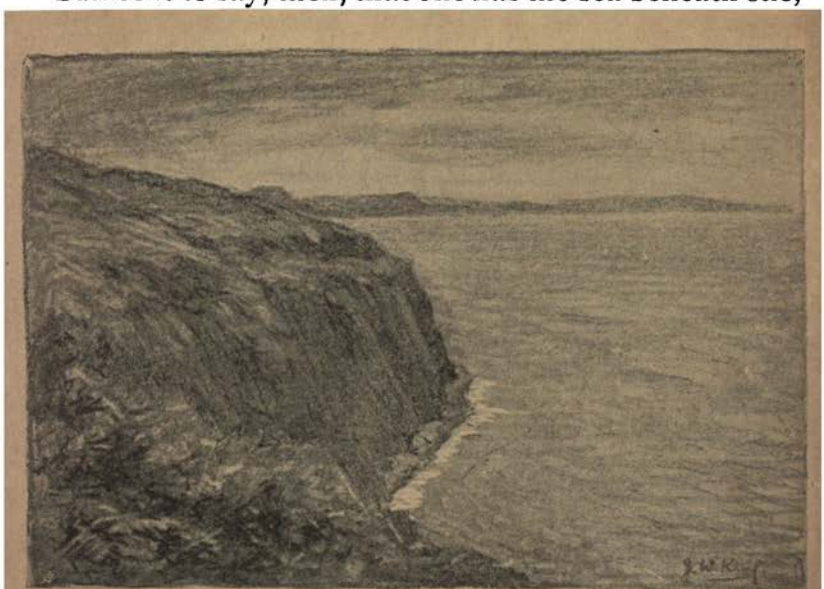
had done his homage at Louisa's steps, found it an admirable place. "This exactly represents some of the romantic landscape before my mind's eye in the *Idylls*," Palgrave recalls him saying, "little winding glades, closed all round with grassy mounds and wild shrubs, where one might fancy the sudden appearance of a knight riding, or a spell-bound damsel." This remark suggests self-absorption, but the poet was none the less just in his appreciation. However, if I had wanted a literary allusion for the charm of these glades, I should have gone back past Tennyson to the more authentic romance of Keats; or else to Malory, the lovely medieval shrine from which the great Victorian poet took the marble for his exquisite modern statuary —which, perhaps, will still be standing, unharmed by all the loans it has made, and still a holy place of pilgrimage when Tennyson's white perfection shall be dusty in limbo.

But this is a blasphemous digression. Tennyson, though not in the *Idylls*, is beyond criticism.

Leaving Lyme by way of Ware Lane, one comes first of all, just over the county border, to the Ware Cliffs. Passing through a gate, one is among as fine coast scenery as one can want. It is no use to attempt to describe it. The heaping of epithets is vain where nature is concerned. Poetry can give you the soul of a place in a flash. And poetry is sometimes

written in prose: but not by me. Mere description, whether prose or verse, is time wasted. It will never be read to the end. At least that (speaking as a reader) is my experience.

Suffice it to say, then, that one has the sea beneath one,



PINHAY BAY.

rich and tangled greenery all around and above, with here and there the jutting of some fine crag like the Chimney Rock. That is just an index for the imagination.

At Pinhay the broad and obvious path ends. Thence onwards one must pick one's way. If you are a respecter of the law, or hold the same in wholesome

fear, you will go carefully, for all along these cliffs there is a succession of private estates; first Pinhay, then Whitlands, then Charton and finally Rousdon.

The going gets rougher and rougher, now uphill, now downhill; hot work on a hot day. But it is worth the trouble, whatever the temperature. More and more you realise the truth of Tennyson's impression. The place is as romantic as can be. You might meet fairies or fauns here at any moment; or knights errant or ancient queens. Or perhaps you prefer nature as Wordsworth knew it, unpeopled, or populous only with men and women, leech-gatherers and little cottagers. Probably you will not meet many such on your walk, but you will find plenty of food for moralising. You can muse most profitably on the mutability of nature. For this rich landscape is almost new. And any moment, I suppose, its place might be taken by another.

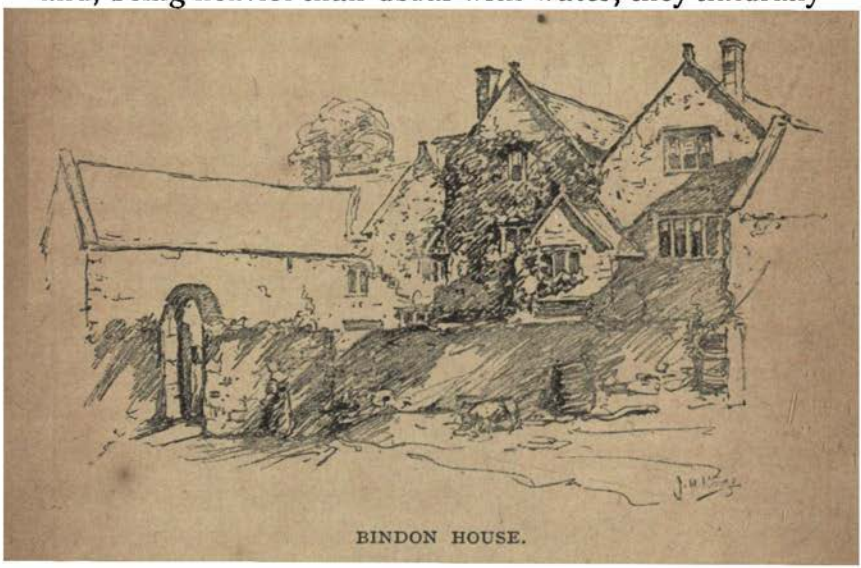
It is just below Rousdon that one enters on the scene of the great landslip of 1839. It is rather interesting to know how one's scenery is made. Of course, one can always learn that from the geology books. But that is merely deductive and very impersonal. This is a circumstantial story with a human element.

The fact that it happened on Christmas Eve gives it an almost Dickensian atmosphere. Some merry-makers returning late to their cottage were surprised

to find that the path was a foot lower than usual. They went to bed, however, but in the night were wakened by noises, and found that the walls were cracking round them. Outside the earth was opening in great fissures. The cottagers warned their neighbours, and all made their way to a less alarming spot. All that night and on Christmas Day the disturbances continued. Some people, including a party out shooting rabbits, experienced no little difficulty in extricating themselves from the increasing network of gullies. As the cliffs gradually sank towards the shore, a great reef rose in the sea, a mile long and forty feet high. This, however, soon began to sink again and eventually disappeared.

Naturally these happenings produced intense excitement and alarm. Just as naturally everyone, except the learned, called the thing an earthquake. I should have done so myself. But of course it was nothing of the sort. The scientific explanation, put simply (for my own benefit, not yours) is as follows. The geological formation of the cliffs is (1) a capping of chalk, resting on (2) beds of consolidated sandstone mixed with flints, beneath which are (3) about one hundred feet of loose sand, and beneath that (4) beds of the clay known as lias. Now 1839 was a very wet year. The rain soaked right through the chalk, the sandstone and the loose sand. But the more consistent clay stopped it. More rain kept coming, till the upper

strata were full of it. It had to escape somehow, so it followed the line of least resistance by washing the loose sand out at the joints exposed by the slope of the cliff. Thus the sandstone beds were undermined, and, being heavier than usual with water, they naturally

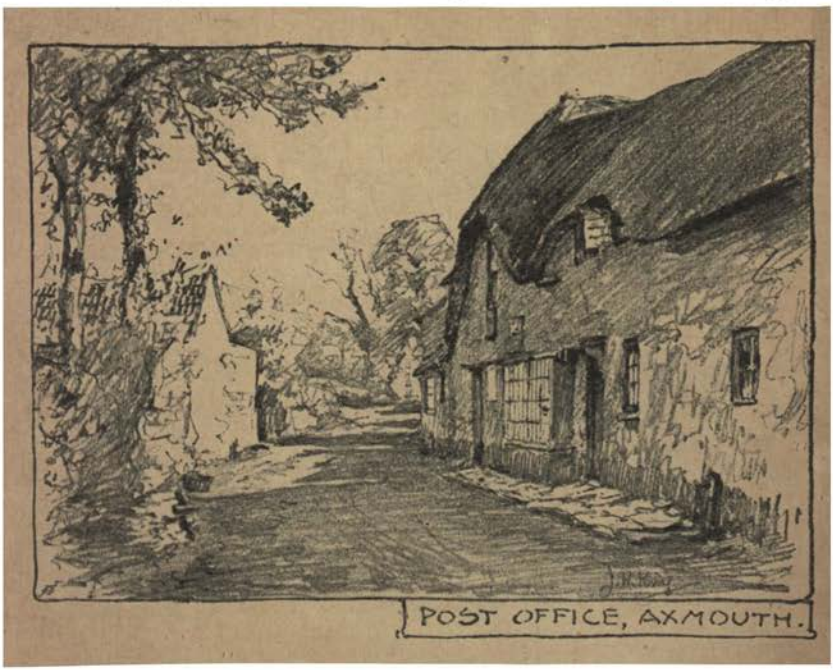


BINDON HOUSE.

fell in. The thing has happened before. It will probably happen again.

This must have been a ragged and raw place on the morrow of the cataclysm. Rent earth can be as unlovely as rent flesh. But to-day the Dowlands Landslip is a beautiful glade between land and sea, covered with grass and shrubs and trees. The size of the trees shows how fertile a country this is. One

can hardly believe that the scene was formed only seventy years ago, that it is but the age of a man, and that there might easily be men alive who remember its making. There is a cottage, the Landslip Cottage



POST OFFICE, AXMOUTH.

which performed the difficult descent of I know not how many feet and arrived unharmed at the bottom.

One arrives out of the slipped land onto Seaton Golf Links, a fine bare sweep of green that pleases by its contrast with the broken country just left. A path leads on to the road whence either Seaton or Axmouth

are easily reached. First, however, it is quite worth while to return half a mile eastwards. This takes one to Bindon House, once the home of Sir Walter Erle, who fought with distinction in the Parliament cause.

IN AXMOUTH STREET.

It is a picturesque old manor house, built probably in the sixteenth century. Here, as at Ashe, ancient dignity is commemorated in a chapel, which is of earlier date than the house itself.

AXMINSTER TO MUSBURY

Just west of Bindon the road forks. The northern branch leads to Axmouth, a village with a past. Leland found it "an olde and bigge fischar toune on the este side of the Haven." The excellent and erudite *Guide to Lyme* states that "Axmouth was anciently a place of importance and formed part of the Anglo-Saxon royal demense; it is said that it could boast of fourteen hotels." Anglo-Saxon *hotels* tickles the fancy. Anyway, Axmouth was at one time of far greater moment than it is to-day.

Not so many generations ago, long since Leland's time, tall ships might ride at anchor where the Axe merges with the sea. But the river, which made the harbour, has been its destruction; that, and the busy modern spirit of progress, which has no use for the little town, the little port, but prefers to concentrate its energies in a few great cities, dirty and impersonal. For a long time the men of Seaton and Axmouth fought hard against the wasting of the sea and the silting of the river. But, getting no encouragement, they at last desisted.

So Axmouth has gone to sleep by the silent river, in the kindly protection of Hawksdown Hill, the bold and woody height on which the old Durotriges made their southernmost defences. Down its one long street of cottages wanders a brooklet of crystal water, the playground of the cleanest ducks in the world. The contrast

is very striking between the purity of this water, which, is carefully tended, and the muddiness of the neighbouring river, at any rate at low tide.

Axmouth church contains traces of Norman, if not of Saxon, workmanship. There is a quaint tradition about

the medieval effigy in the chancel, which represents a priest reclining, his hands crossed, his head on a little pillow, his feet resting on a dog, which may, however, be a lion. It is said to represent some benefactor of the church, and the dog is supposed to mean that his gift was only made on condition that his favourite dog should be buried with him. Is is a pleasing story, and reminds one of Mr. Henry Newbolt's poem, *Fidele's Grassy Tomb*, which is too long to quote here.

SEATON, BEER AND BRANSCOMBE

SEATON BAY, LOOKING WESTWARD.

Chapter VIII

SEATON, BEER AND BRANSCOMBE

THERE is no bridge at the village, so that to get from Axmouth to Seaton it is necessary to walk for a mile along the left bank of the broadening river until one is almost at the river's minnikin mouth. For though, from about Colyford onward, the Axe becomes wider and wider in the orthodox way, just before it gets to the sea it narrows down, like every other stream on this coast, to a meagre and vacillating driblet. In fact, if a strong east wind blows, it is completely and ignominiously throttled by the shifting beach of pebbles.

Over the bridge, a modern one, where until recently toll was demanded, one is soon in Seaton. The approach is not prepossessing. First comes a railway-station. Then a half-made road of cheap new houses.

For Seaton, like Axmouth, has fallen from a higher estate by the destruction of the harbour. But it has not sat down under the misfortune. It is making a strenuous effort to retrieve its fortunes.

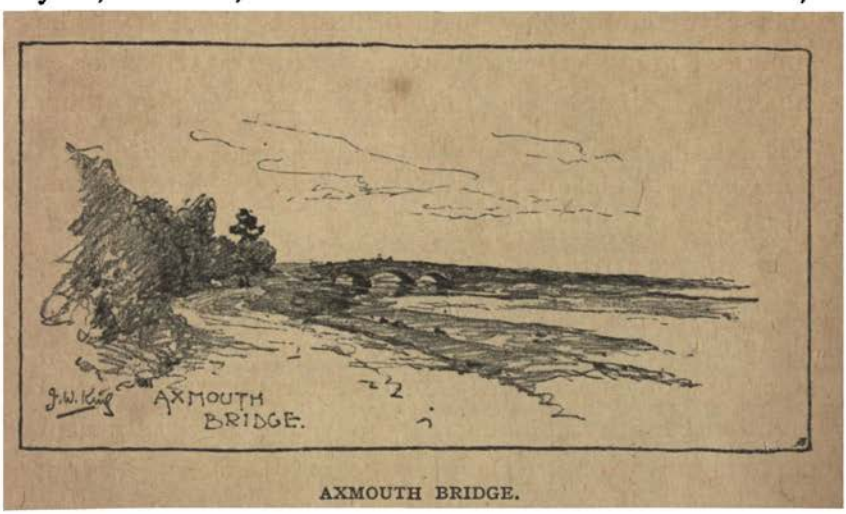
In the circumstances, I think those who sneer at

Seaton's recent developments more than a little ungenerous. They might acknowledge the courage, even if they take exception to the taste evidenced. Besides, they are unreasonable. As so often happens, some superior person discovers an unfrequented and beautiful spot. He is immensely pleased with himself and his find. He tells all his superior friends about it. The superior man's friends are, of course, themselves superior. That is the mischief. There are so many superior people in the world. They all go to the new place, which no one has ever heard of before. They swarm there. Then the inhabitants, partly, no doubt, with an eye to the main chance, but chiefly, I expect, from an honest desire to make these unexpected but obviously superior guests as comfortable as possible, start building houses for their entertainment. Arises a great scream that the place is spoilt, and all the superior persons quit it on another voyage of discovery, leaving the new lodging-houses to the mere tripper and holiday-maker, whose attention has by this time been attracted and who are not too high-minded to enjoy staying where someone else has stayed before them.

Something like that is, I suppose, the modern history of Seaton. Or if it is not, it very easily might be.

Anyway, as I have said, the town deserves respect for its fighting qualities. Its battle has ever been a losing one. The odds have been so tremendous. To go back

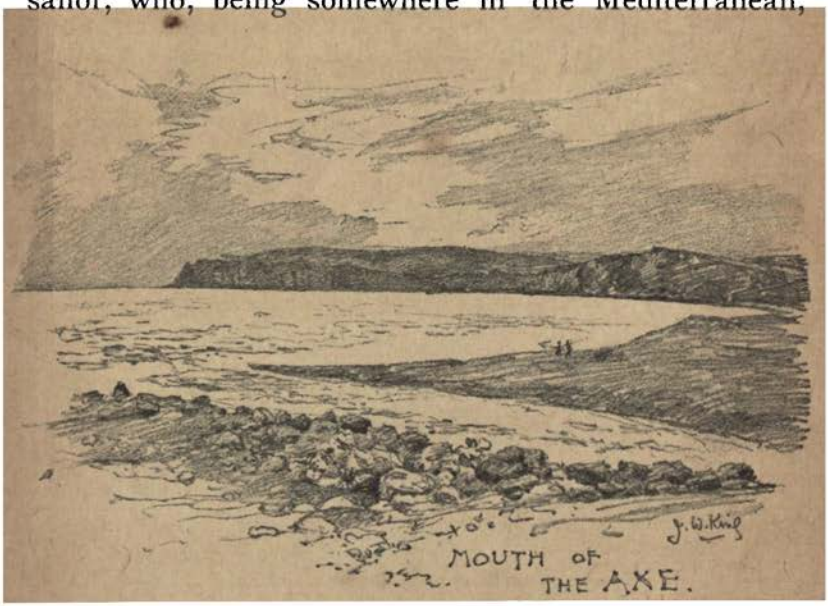
to Leland again, even when he visited Seaton it was "a mere fisschar toun," which had "been far larger when the haven was good." "The men of Seaton began of late dayes to stake and to make a mayne waulle withyn the haven, to have diverted the course of the Ax ryver, and ther, almost in the middle of the old haven,



AXMOUTH BRIDGE.

to have trenchid through the chisille [beach], and to have let out Ax and receyvid in the main se. But this purpose came not to effect." Risdon, a hundred years after Leland, and Stukeley, a hundred years after Risdon, both comment on Seaton's fallen estate, and both mention efforts to restore the harbour. Stukeley, indeed, tells a curious story of the building of the sea-wall, which is best given in his own words. "Just by

the present haven mouth is a great and long pier or wall jutting out into the sea, made of great rocks piled together to the bredth of six yards. They told me it was built many years ago by one Courd, once a poor sailor, who, being somewhere in the Mediterranean,



was told by a certain Greek that much treasure was hid upon Hogsdon Hill, near here, and that this memorial was transmitted to him by his ancestors. Courd, upon his return, digging there, luckily found the gold mine, which enriched him prodigiously. So that at his own expense he built this wall, with an intent to restore the harbour."

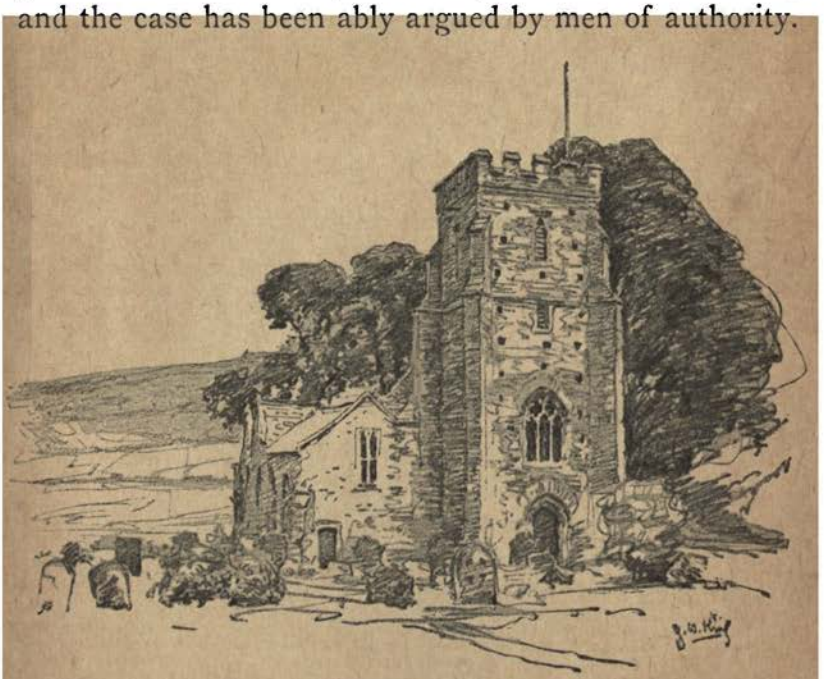
It was at Seaton that the Danes landed on the eve of

the battle which was or was not Brunenburgh. Before that, the place may or may not have been the great Roman outpost town in the west known as Moridunum.

FORE STREET, SEATON.

Here, as always in such cases, one is wallowing in hypotheses. Still, if one can believe the evidence of the senses, Seaton *was* Moridunum ; for is it not written in letters of black flint, as large as life, which stretch half-way along the esplanade? It is true that this

mammoth label was only put up half a century ago. But what is that to anyone except the dry-as-dust archæologist? Roman remains, moreover, have been found here, and the case has been ably argued by men of authority.



SEATON CHURCH.

But it is modern Seaton that concerns us here, with its little railway station, its smooth esplanade, its shops and lodging houses, which certainly do not prompt to archæological speculation. The most curious thing about the place (after its newness) is the elusive nature of its church. I looked for it everywhere. I even

SEATON BAY, LOOKING EASTWARD.

found it on the map. But it eluded me like an illusion. I always dislike asking my way, so I followed trail after fruitless trail. Finally, accepting the inevitable—which, by the way, is precisely what the church was *not*—I gave up the search and went on to Beer.

Next time I was in Seaton I came primed with precise knowledge on this difficult point. But it was tea-time. My straits were as great as ever. Here was a church. Here was I, an inquiring visitor. My duty was obvious. Conscience said "Church," saying it loudly and sternly. But my soul said "Tea." And reflecting that conscience is but a malady of the soul, the corrupt part of a lovely whole, I listened to the higher and purer call. So to this day I have not seen Seaton church. But I can tell you all about it. "The church is Dec. with remains of E.E. and Perp. additions and insertions. Very little of the E.E. church remains, as it was rebuilt in 1360, when a S. tower was erected. In the 15th cent. this tower was in part removed and another tower erected at the W. end. In the chancel note the hagioscope, showing externally like an oriel window. The fine screen was destroyed at the so-called 'restoration' in 1866." That has saved us all a deal of trouble.[1]

[1] This quotation, so irreverently made, is from the Rev. S. Baring Gould's admirable *Devon*, one of the "Little Guides." In a far more serious spirit I take the opportunity of expressing my sense of its value; also of Heath's *Dorset*, and indeed the whole series.

At Seaton the red cliffs begin, which are so familiar a feature of the coast a little further west. Hitherto (eastward, that is to say) the cliffs have been of non-descript greys and yellows. Then beyond Beer, of course, they suddenly whiten, where the great line of chalk, which began at Whitby, reaches at last the southern sea. But in this pretty bay they are brilliant red, and with their bright green crests, and the two blues of the sea and the sky, they form a colour scheme which seems appropriate to some Latin coast. It is almost fast for sober England to deck herself so gaily.

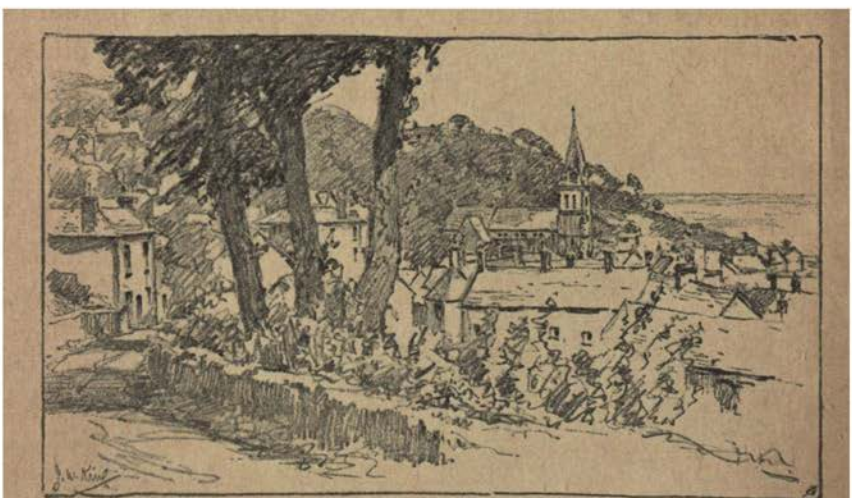
Along the beach is one way of getting from Seaton to Beer, and a very interesting way, though it entails much clambering and scrambling over rocks. You may sprain your ankle and you may, I imagine, be cut off by the tide, and there is always a chance that a piece of the cliff will fall on your head. But it is very pleasant for all that.

Or you may go by road. Or you may combine the two, keeping to the beach while it is smooth, or rather while the asphalt sea-walk lasts, and then climbing the cliff by a convenient path which will put you on the road.

Of all the steep descents into towns that into Beer is steepest. One literally pitches into the place. And one could scarcely find a more fascinating place to pitch into.

It is like a little world apart, an outlandish un-English sort of spot. Dealings with the outer world it has had,

historic dealings. There were the smugglers, for instance, but of them anon. Let us do the place justice and mention its more respectable connexions first. It was the lace-makers of Beer who made Queen Victoria's wedding-dress. From the Beer quarries came the stone of which Exeter Cathedral was built. The connexion



BEER.

between these two events may seem remote, but no one will deny the importance of either. And Beer had a hand in them both.

The lace-making and the quarrying still go on. The great underground quarries, however, have ceased to be worked. They are given over to the bats, those sinister beasts, and it is unsafe to enter them without a lantern

and someone who knows the way. For there are deep and dark pools and wandering passages, where one might easily get lost. People have spent the night there before now.

But it was about the outlandishness of Beer and its

inhabitants that I set out to write. There is a legend as to this. It is said that some time in Elizabeth's reign, a Spanish crew was wrecked on the rocks here. As it happened, Beer had recently been ravaged by the plague and sadly needed repopulating. So the Spaniards, instead of being butchered, were invited to stay and to mate with the women of the place. Thus the swarthi-

BEER HEAD.

ness of some of the Beer fishermen of to-day is explained by their being the descendants of these "Spanish sailors with bearded lips."

There are those who deny that Longfellow was a poet worthy of any consideration. If you asserted that he was a great poet they would laugh. But the fact remains that he was one, though his great work is extremely scarce. One great poem, however, is enough to make a great poet, and Longfellow wrote at least one undoubtedly great poem. That is *My Lost Youth*, with its beautiful refrain:

> A boy's will is the wind's will,
> And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.

The whole poem is a splendid thing, and it reaches its highest point in the stanza from which I have just quoted.

> I remember the black wharves and the slips,
> And the sea-tides tossing free;
> And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
> And the beauty and mystery of the ships
> And the magic of the sea.

I think that Kipling, one of whose virtues is a penetrating critical sense, has somewhere either implicitly or explicitly admitted his admiration of those lines. It was Kipling also who created the fine phrase "Clear Vision" to describe a certain poetic quality which is undoubtedly achieved in them.

I am wandering from my theme again. But not so

very far. For if Longfellow's poem is one of the finest bits of sea poetry ever written, Beer and the men of Beer—quarries and lace notwithstanding—live and die by the sea.

In the old days it was the very capital of smugglers. Heroes of that noble profession swarmed here. To this day their exploits are unforgotten. Chief of them all

BEACHING FISHER BOATS AT BEER.

was Jack Rattenbury, about whom the stories have not only been told but written. In 1837 a book was printed at Sidmouth, which bore the title: *Memoirs of a Smuggler, compiled from his Diary and Journal: containing the Principal Events in the life of John Rattenbury, of Beer, Devonshire; commonly called "the Rob Roy of the West."* I know not what hand the smuggler had in the production

of this little work, which, though written in the first person, is not exactly in the style to be expected from one of his trade. But it is a stirring narrative, full of hairbreadth escapes, changing fortunes, and desperate fighting. Whoever wrote the preface asserts that "the name of Rattenbury has long been familiar to the public, and his exploits a theme of conversation from the little fishing cove of Beer (where he was born) to the rocky shores of Vecta, and from the islands surrounding the coast of Normandy and Brittany to the remote promontory,

> Where England, stretch'd toward the setting sun,
> Narrow and long, o'erlooks the western main."

Perhaps the lustre of Rattenbury's fame has become a little dimmed with time even in the restricted area here indicated. Yet the stories told of him are still exciting. If one were to begin to tell them it would be difficult to leave off. And to say anything about smuggling that would be worth putting on paper a bigger book and another pen than mine would be wanted.

Smuggling, of course, is among the dead arts; but the men of Beer are still singularly bold on the sea. It is not their Spanish blood, which may be all a myth, but their Danish blood, which is a fact, that gives them this virtue. For Beer was originally a Danish settlement. And now when the weather is too "puffy" for the Celts of Lyme to venture their boats, these children

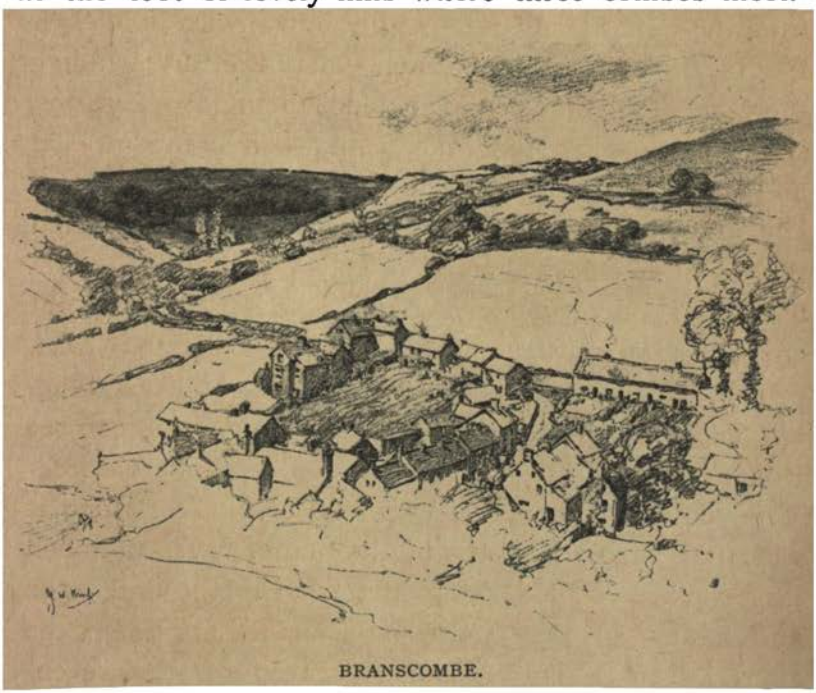
of the Viking stock are out on the cresting waves and selling their fish in the streets of Lyme itself.

But, whatever their breed, it is difficult to see what other calling they could follow. For they are cut off from the land by precipitous hills, but the sea is at their feet. The little secluded beach, where they are mending their nets, as they have mended them for centuries, shelves so steeply that the fishing-boats can ride at anchor close in to the shore. This in itself is a material advantage. But the water is so clear and beautiful that those who live by it must also feel a spiritual call.

There is only a modern church at Beer. If you want churches you must go a little further west to Branscombe. It is a good two miles by the shortest road, but if you will make it half a mile longer you can see Bovey House on the way. This is a very fine old freestone house, or rather the remains of one, for when it was lived in by the lords of the manor it was a much larger place. On a rain-water head is the date 1592 and much of the house is Elizabethan. In the courtyard is a large leaden cistern of the seventeenth century decorated with embossed figures and other ornaments. In a well, from which the house is supplied with water, a hiding-place was found, and another in one of the chimneys. Evidently the builders thought it well to provide against emergencies.

And now for Branscombe, which, apart from any

other consideration, is as beautiful a village as you can hope to find out of Paradise. Thatched and ancient, and peaceful with the peace of valleys, it lies scattered at the foot of lovely hills where three combes meet.

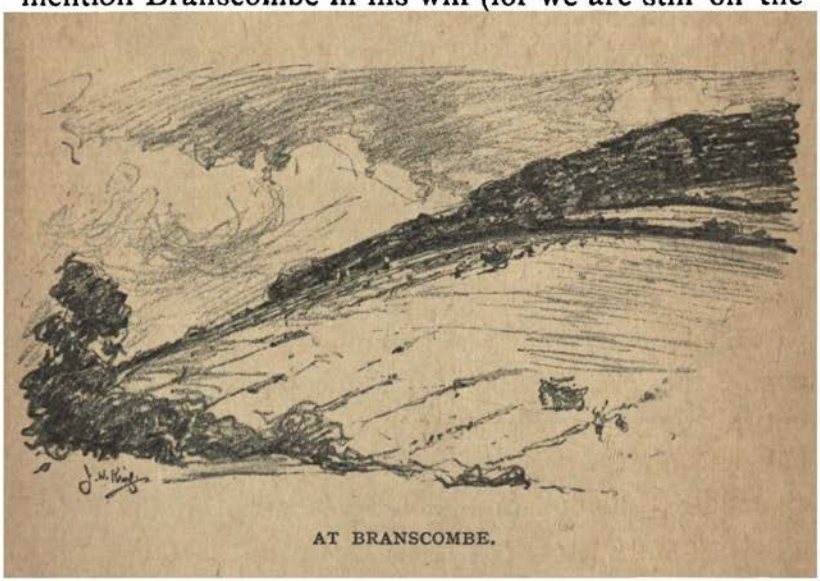


BRANSCOMBE.

Down each of these a streamlet trickles, joining to form the baby Branscombe River. The cliffs, which are magnificently broken, rise high, shutting the village in on their side also, but at the mouth of its river Branscombe gets a glimpse of the sea.

It has been suggested that Branscombe was called

after St. Brendan, the Irish saint, for the reason that he landed here during one of his famous voyages. Such a derivation is attractive even to those who look on philology as the dustiest of sciences, but the true one is probably far simpler. Alfred, who had cause to mention Branscombe in his will (for we are still on the



AT BRANSCOMBE.

royal demesne) wrote it "Brancescumbe"; the Domesday surveyors have "Branchescoma"; and it is most likely just that, the place where the combes branch.

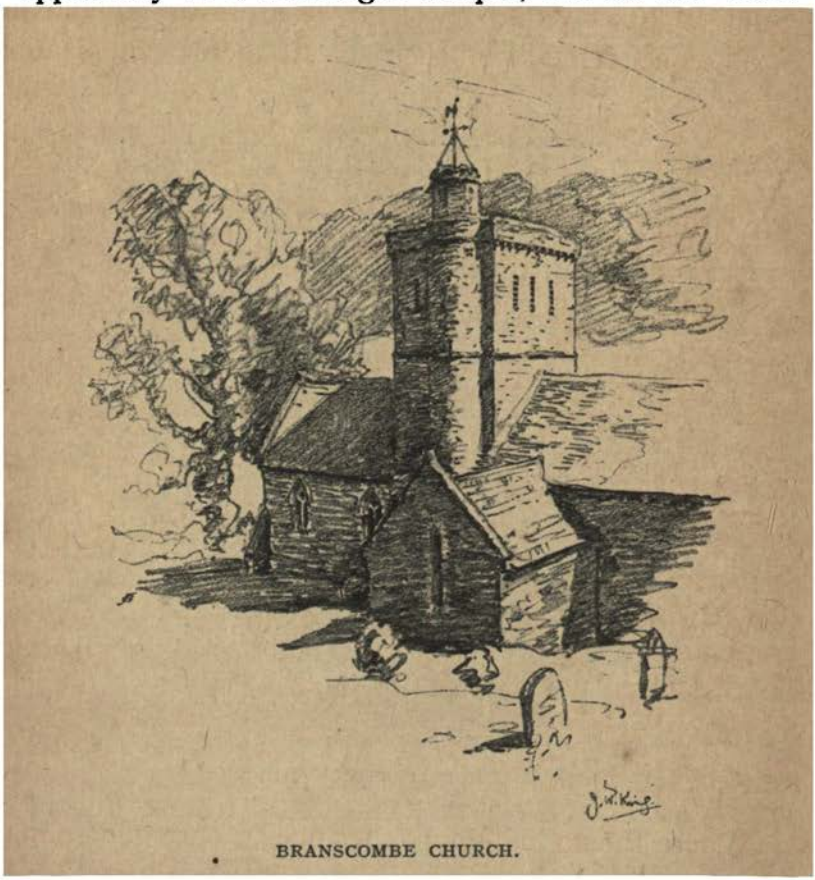
Everything about Branscombe, even the derivation of its name, pleases me. The smithy is more picturesque than other smithies, the houses more mellow, the flowers brighter. Near the church is a very interesting

old building known as Church Living, which was formerly the rectory. A mile away is Edge Barton, where Walter of Branscombe was born, a thirteenth century Bishop of Exeter, remembered for his building. Later the place belonged to the Wadhams, the Wyndhams and the Strangways. It has been rebuilt in modern times, but there is still Tudor and even earlier work to be seen.

But I am keeping the best thing till the last. It is the church, mainly, that one comes to Branscombe to see. For here at last, in a country not rich in good church architecture, is a really magnificent church. It charms by its actual qualities, not, like Whitchurch Canonicorum, by its associations. At Whitchurch, you remember, besides a church of undoubted architectural attractions, we found all sorts of other emotional delights. At Branscombe there is nothing like that. The place depends entirely on what its builders did for it, and on what time has left undestroyed. The builders lived in days of splendid craftsmanship, and time has overlooked this quiet valley.

Here, then, is a church of which some architectural description must needs be given. But I am forgetting one interesting matter. Branscombe church is dedicated to St. Winifred, a British saint of the seventh century, whose legend is curious. As I did not know it before, I arrogantly assume that you did not. It may be told very briefly. Winifred was loved by Prince Cradocus,

but did not encourage his suit. So Cradocus, who was apparently of a downright temper, cut off her head.



BRANSCOMBE CHURCH.

But the retribution of Heaven was swift. The prince fell dead, and the earth opened and swallowed him. Winifred's head had meanwhile rolled down the hill on

which this sudden drama had been enacted. At the bottom, it was found by St. Bueno who replaced it on the body. Winifred was at once restored, and her subsequent life was such as to merit canonisation.

IN BRANSCOMBE CHURCH.

Where Bueno had found her head a spring of remarkable curative virtue gushed out of the earth.

The church is a cruciform building, with a massive central tower of late Norman work, at one corner of which is a turret marking the head of a circular stair-

case. The nave is also Norman, though less purely so, and the chancel was built by fine workmen in the thirteenth century. The windows especially are shapely. So also is the perpendicular east window, which bears the arms of the Kingmaker's precocious brother, George Nevill, who was Bishop of Exeter in his teens and

THE BEACH, BRANSCOMBE.

Chancellor of England at the age of twenty-five. Outside is a flight of steps leading to the Tudor gallery. There is an open cradle-roof, on a boss of which the Nevill shield appears once more; a primitive screen beneath the eastern arch of the tower; Jacobean communion rails and table; traces of Anglo-Saxon work in the tower; an Elizabethan gallery; a three-decker

pulpit; and high-backed pews which reflect the austerity of a hundred years ago.

But this is becoming a mere catalogue. All these things, and much else, will be found in the very excellent little book written by the present vicar of Branscombe, and quite recently issued as a means of collecting money for the restoration of which the old church stands in need. That word "restoration" has lost the sinister sound that it had half a century back. Nowadays it is reverence and not contempt for the ancient fabric that prompts the restorer's efforts.

In interesting monuments the church abounds. The oldest is the slab on the floor of the south transept which begs you pray for the soul of John Hedmunt. It has lain there since the fifteenth century. But it is the tombs of the late Renaissance that always attract one's attention. Debased artistically, they have an elaborate arrogance which compels one away from the work of simpler ages. You remember how they obsessed us at Colyton and at Musbury. There are two of them at Branscombe, both, curiously enough, to the memory of women of Cornwall. One, the tablet with the Corinthian columns and entablature of masks in the sacrarium, commemorates Anne Mychell of Truro, who married Ellys Bartlett of Branscombe. The other is noted.

I have mentioned that Edge Barton at one time

belonged to the Wadhams. It was quite likely the birthplace of Sir Nicholas Wadham, who founded the college at Oxford which bears his name. His mother, at any rate, lies buried in Branscombe church, and he himself, though not very distinctively, appears on her tomb. Joan Wadham, born Tregarthin (an ancient name) was twice married; first to John Kelleway and secondly to John Wadham. On her tomb the two husbands kneel face to face, Wadham clad in armour, his helm and gauntlets before him, Kelleway wearing some academic dress. Behind each of them, on a much smaller scale (as beseems her sex) kneels the duplicated figure of Joan; and behind her, ranged on their appropriate sides, kneel the "much issue" she bore Kelleway and the "several children" she bore Wadham. For she was twenty times a mother. Above this family group, which is cut in high relief on a pedimented tablet, are three shields, or rather two shields and a lozenge; the latter displaying the six quarterings of Tregarthin (whereof one is Plantagenet Earl of Cornwall), while the shields bear respectively the four quarterings of Kelleway and the nine of Wadham, each impaling the Tregarthin coat.

It would be an anticlimax to enumerate the other memorials after this, which is so much the most interesting. But an epitaph must be plucked from several quaint ones in the churchyard as entirely

worthy of the century of conceit in which it was composed. It celebrates a father and son named Lees, who were buried together in 1658, and runs:

> The wine that in these earthen vessels lay,
> The hand of Death hath lately drawn away,
> And as a present served it up on high,
> Whilst here the vessels with the Lees do lie.

I am conscious that I have not done justice to Branscombe, but it is a place of which the charm is indescribable. That of it which is to be caught by human ingenuity falls to the share of the draughtsman rather than of the penman. Obviously.

BRANSCOMBE CHURCH KEY.

FORD ABBEY

Chapter IX

FORD ABBEY

THE time has come to find a manner of ending these wandering sentences. One cannot chatter for ever. But it has amused me, if no one else, this inconsequent pilgrimage, this yielding to impressions and indolent pursuit of trails which, only for a moment maybe, have taken my fancy. I could make no better exit than through the portals of Ford Abbey.

Possibly those who know the country, or the map thereof, have been wondering when I was going to visit that great house, which I almost sighted at Thorncombe and was well on the way to when I walked from Axminster to Coaxdon Hall. Very likely they thought I was shirking so large a theme, and preferred more appropriate wanderings among lesser matters. They did me an injustice. I do not maintain that I am going to treat the theme as it deserves. To tell the story of an English abbey is to tell the story of a soul which has passed through a great crisis, which has either killed the soul outright or started it on a ruinous course or put it in the way of a new and freer, if more material, life. That, certainly, is not the task of

which I propose to attempt the fulfilment. But this book would not be complete—if so formless a thing can ever be said to be complete or even incomplete—would not (shall we say?) really exist at all if it did not contain a few facts, and perhaps a thought or two, on the famous abbey of Ford.

You see the building from the railway, lying just over the Axe, a few minutes before you get to Chard Junction. Perhaps, struck by its magnificent appearance, you will get out of the train at that station, walk the mile to the South Gate and visit the place at once.

It is certainly imposing to see. But, on the whole, it is better to know something of its history first. A pedant's view, possibly, but mine none the less. A perfect work of art is sufficient in itself, and needs no extraneous aids to attraction. But of imperfect works, of 999,999 out of every million that is to say, the æsthetic deficiency may often be balanced by the addition of a little historic interest.

Dogmatics apart, the story of the foundation of Ford Abbey is a gem in itself. In 1132 Richard de Redvers, lord of Okehampton, whose mother is said to have been a niece of the Conqueror, was moved to do a pious work. So he induced thirteen monks to leave the great Cistercian abbey at Waverley in Surrey and to take up their abode in the new house that he built for them at Brightley in Okehampton parish. One of the thirteen,

HAWKCHURCH.

called Richard like his patron, was chosen abbot. The Lord Richard's intentions were admirable. Unfortunately his benevolence did not have the results for which he had hoped. He never knew this, however,

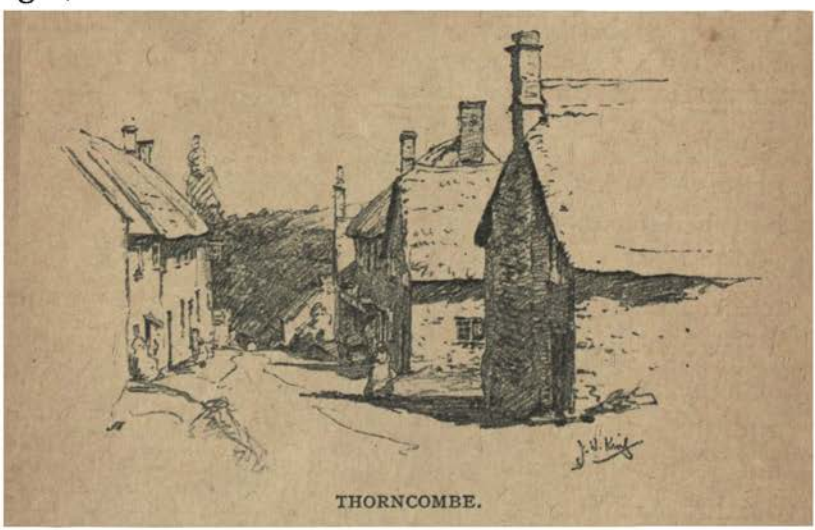
BARN, ONCE A CHURCH, AT HOLDITCH.

for he died a very few years after he had completed his foundation.

What happened was that the monks, used to clement Surrey, found the windy uplands of Dartmoor too bleak a home. They experienced great difficulty in getting sustenance from the thinly clad granite rocks. Five years after their founder's death, therefore, they made up their corporate mind to return to Waverley.

Now at West Ford, within the Redvers manor of

Thorncombe, lived the late lord of Okehampton's sister Alice, and it was doubtless with the intention of paying their respects to one so nearly akin to their would-be benefactor, and perhaps also with the feeling that they owed her some explanation of their renunciation of his gift, that the monks made a detour which took them



THORNCOMBE.

considerably off their direct road. They arrived at Thorncombe one fine day in processional order headed by Abbot Robert, Abbot Richard's successor, who carried a great cross. This influx of monks into her quiet territory naturally roused the curiosity of the lady of the manor and she sent to inquire who the pilgrims might be. Enlightened as to that, and also as to the reason of their exodus from Brightley, she was very concerned. She

was both sorry for the poor monks and grieved that her brother's pious intention should be so untimely frustrated. Her decision was as prompt as it was generous.

It is always good when the actual words that were spoken on historic occasions are recorded. If someone would compile a book of such, it would make a very interesting volume. And not so very bulky. For, if we except set speeches, the words of men and women who did not live in quite recent times are but scantily perpetuated in the authoritative sources of history. What Alice said to the monks from Brightley, however, has come down the centuries. This was it:

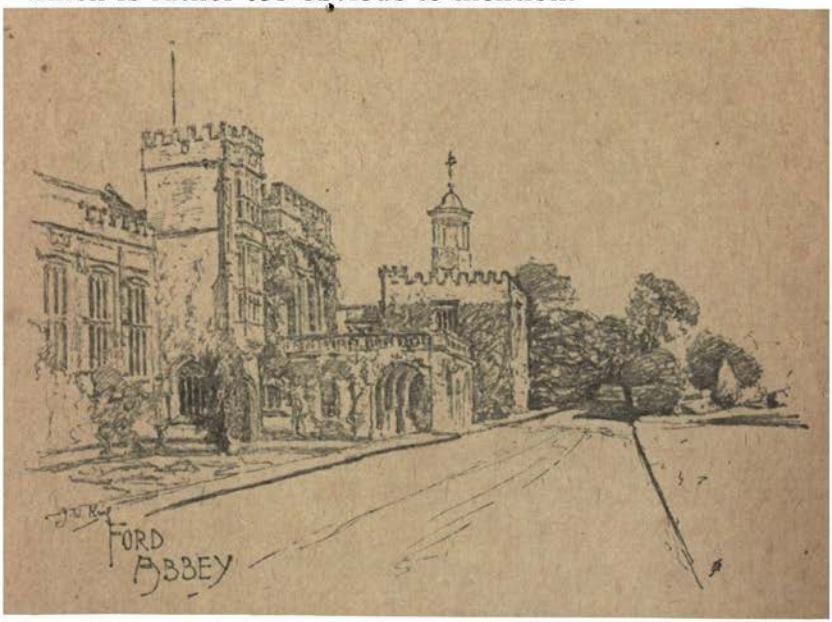
"Far be it from me, my lords and most holy fathers, to deserve so dire a reproach and to incur so ignoble a risk as this. What my lord and brother Richard, out of a heart full of pure devotion, for the honour of God and the salvation of us all, began so solemnly, shall not I, his sister and heir, into whose hands, before his death, he delivered all his possessions, be willing or able to accomplish? Behold my manor on which I now reside! It is sufficiently fertile—it is sheltered and shaded with woods—it is productive of grain and other fruits of the earth; behold we give it you in exchange for the barren land of Brightley, together with our manor house forever! Remain here till somewhere else on this estate you can have a more fitting monastery. We shall not fail you in this; nay, we shall help you to build it."

So a spot called Hartsbath was selected, and the new abbey begun forthwith, the fortunate monks living in comfort at the manor house until it was ready for them. Their instalment took place six years later.

Among the first ceremonies to be performed at Ford Abbey was the sepulture of the Lady Alice, who had not lived to see the fruit of her generosity fully ripe. Her lands were soon afterwards acquired by the Courtenays, with whom, both for good and for evil, the monks were henceforth in close association. Some who bore the mighty name were among the abbey's kindest benefactors, others were ready to treat it with full feudal arrogance. One John de Courtenay, for example, who was saved from shipwreck, as he thought, by the intercession of the monks, not only greatly enriched the community but himself died a member of it. His son Hugh, on the other hand, was of a different temper. He endeavoured to impose on the monks the services of carrying his baggage in time of war and of looking after his hunting-dogs; which was much as though some modern squire should expect the vicar of his parish to be his golf-caddy and tend his kennels. Possibly there are squires who would like such an arrangement, but very few would have the face to suggest it.

Twenty-five or twenty-six abbots, including those at bleak Brightley, ruled the monks of Ford between foundation and dissolution; and though this is no place

for stringing names and dates a few of them must be mentioned. Carlyle has shown what, in the way of modern literature, can be made of a medieval abbot. But unfortunately there was no Jocelyn of Brakelonde at Ford. There is also another defect in the analogy, which is rather too obvious to mention.



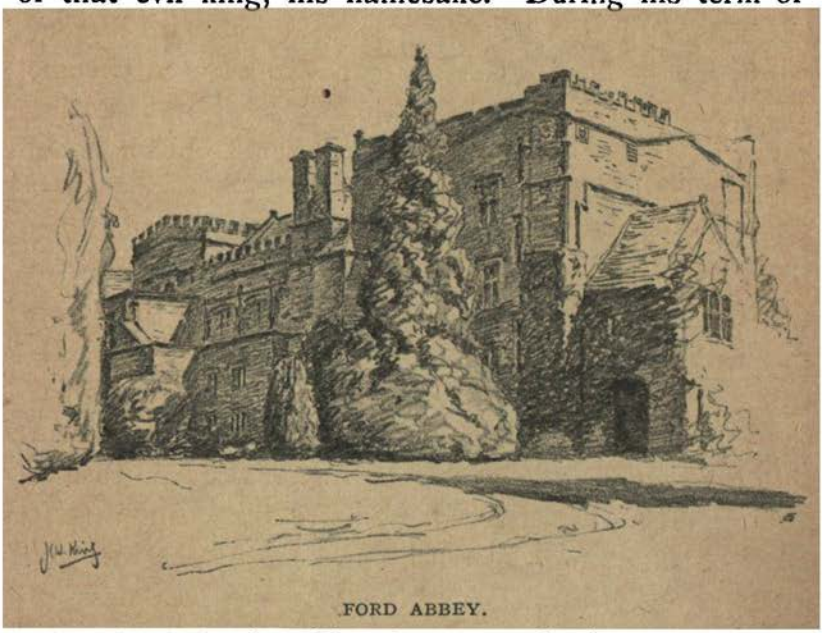
Of Richard, who came from Waverley, and of Robert who very nearly returned there, there is not much else to tell. The third abbot, the first actually appointed to Ford, was, on the whole, the most remarkable man ever set at the head of that convent. Born at Exeter of insignificant parentage, this Baldwin showed such

aptitude and application that he became archdeacon of his natal see. But the pomp of the office irked him. He resigned it, and became a monk of Ford. Within a year he had risen to the abbacy. During his tenure of the office he devoted himself to literary work, until in 1180 he left the convent to become Bishop of Worcester. Four years later, after a disputed election, he was anointed Archbishop of Canterbury. His tenure of that high office does not seem to have been entirely successful, much of his time being taken up in a quarrel with the monks of Christ Church which aroused, on one side or the other, the partisanship of half Europe. Pope Urban III. called him "the most fervent monk, the zealous abbot, the lukewarm bishop, the careless archbishop." From this one would gather that the higher Baldwin rose in authority the less he was fitted for his position. It must be taken into account, however, that he was not in the Pope's favour; and against the weakness of character imputed to him his influence with the self-willed Henry II. should be borne in mind.

In 1190, after having vigorously preached the crusade in Wales, Archbishop Baldwin followed Cœur-de-Lion to the Holy Land. But before the year was out, disillusioned by the conduct of the crusaders, he fell sick and prayed for death, which shortly came to him.

Of the other notable abbots the next in time was

John of Devon, whose reign was divided from Baldwin's by that of an obscure Robert. A traveller and a scholar and a voluminous writer, he was the confessor of that evil king, his namesake. During his term of



FORD ABBEY.

office the Abbey is said to have contained more learning than any three religious houses of its size. Him followed Roger the Cistercian, too humbly born to have a surname, who was also a great traveller and found as many marvels in foreign parts as did Sir John Mandevyle himself. He wrote lives of Elizabeth, Abbess of Schonaugh, a visionary of renown in her day, and of St. Ursula and her eleven thousand

virgins—"all full (to say no worse) of many fond absurdities," says Prince.

More notorious for his deeds than his writings was William of Crewkerne, during whose abbacy the war between Ford and the Courtenays was at its height. He also quarrelled with Bishop Branscombe of Exeter, whom he went the length of excommunicating. When an abbot excommunicates the prelate in whose see his abbey lies, it is time for the king to intervene. So, at least, thought Edward I., who had the English love of keeping the Church in its place. Moreover, Branscombe begged his assistance. So judges were appointed; and, to cut a long story short, Abbot William had ignominiously to eat his words, to pay a heavy fine and to deliver his agents to a rigorous discipline. Thereafter William of Crewkerne was fain to perform his abbatial duties with as little noise as might be.

The last Abbot of Ford was also a man of note, and he left a more enduring monument than any of his predecessors. A learned clerk of Oxford, he began life in the more worldly branch of the Church, but in 1520 threw up his various rich appointments to become a monk at Ford. As in the similar case of Baldwin, Thomas Chard was appointed abbot a year after his reception into the convent.

It is for his building that we remember Chard. Much of the great house that is still called Ford Abbey was

put up under his direction. There is surely a little irony in this: that the last abbot should spend so much loving care in making permanent improvements in the church which was so soon to be snatched from him and the Church he served.

Chard built the cloisters, the porch tower, and part of the magnificent south front, still the pride of the place. His work is characteristic of his age, an age of transition. It is not medieval. It belongs to the sixteenth century, the epoch of Renaissance and Reformation. That is why Ford, though one of the most perfect, is not one of the most typical and expressive of English abbeys. Renascent as architecture, it is decadent as a religious house.

In 1539, the stone of Chard's building still unworn, the abbey and its revenues passed into the king's hands. Ford had come to its soul's crisis. The second half of its history had begun.

The pros and the cons of the dissolution are far too nicely balanced to be weighed here. To one who is unprejudiced, who stands outside both churches, an argument for is always matched by another against Henry's ruthless policy. Doubtless the air was cleared; but in the old air there had been exquisite music and delicate perfumes. The choice is difficult to make, and, being made, is utterly fruitless. "The moving finger writes."

Ford's second chapter is at any rate interesting.

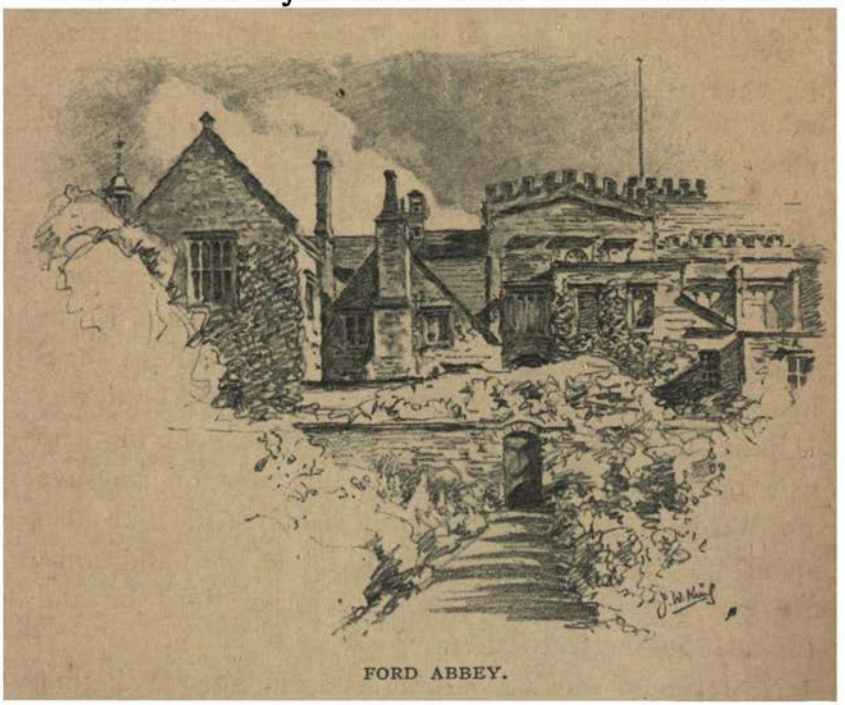
Religion extruded, law and politics claimed it. Its first secular owner, the man to whom the king saw good to give it, was Richard Pollard, a son of the distinguished judge, Sir Lewis Pollard. Richard and his son John were both knighted, and the latter, who sat in three parliaments, sold Ford to Sir Amias Paulet, the last man on whom was bestowed the irksome honour of entertaining Mary, Queen of Scots.

It was a lawman who bought Ford from the Paulets, William Rosewell, solicitor general to Queen Elizabeth. In his family the estate stayed but two generations, and, in the year that saw a king on the scaffold, it was sold to a man of even greater repute both in legal history and in the history of this house. That was Edmund Prideaux, Cromwell's attorney general, who was not only able, by virtue of his position, to save Ford from the zeal of Puritan iconoclasts, but also spent an enormous amount of money on additions. He was, in fact, the creator of modern Ford, he and Inigo Jones between them.

Now Inigo Jones was a famous architect. Whether he was the right man to employ to add to a Gothic building is another matter. His classical porch may be very excellent in itself; but against Chard's frontage it is more than a little incongruous. Still, there can be no doubt that Ford Abbey was a great deal more comfortable to live in after the attorney general's improvements

than it had been before. And comfort is not an unimportant quality in a dwelling-place.

Besides its distinguished owners Ford has from time to time housed sojourners of fame. Thus the tutor whom



FORD ABBEY.

Prideaux employed for his son was John Tillotson, the future Archbishop of Canterbury. The younger Edmund Prideaux learned so much from this gifted divine that he came to be known as the walking encyclopædia.

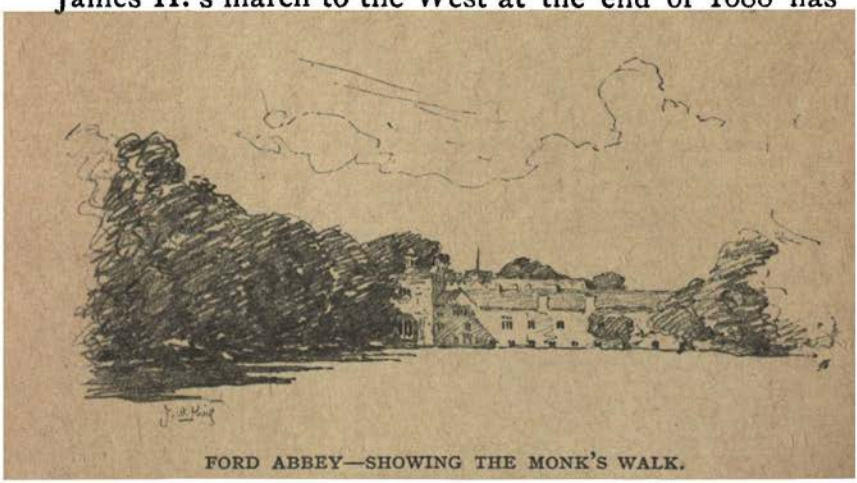
His wisdom, however, did not procure Prideaux peace. He was rash enough to entertain Monmouth during the

"progress" of 1680, and he had to pay the penalty when Jeffreys came. He was accused not only of his five-year-old hospitality, but of having drunk the Duke's health when he landed as *soi-disant* king. In spite of the most shameless efforts at bribery no one could be found to do aught but deny this allegation. But this did not prevent the master of Ford's arrest. If Jeffreys wanted to ruin a man, mere lack of evidence did not deter him. He had a mind above such conventions.

So Prideaux was haled to London and there kept in custody for a month, after which he was discharged on giving security for £10,000 to appear on the first day of the next law term. But before the date arrived he had been once more seized and sent to the Tower on a charge of high treason. His imprisonment lasted seven months. After that he was handed over to the tender mercies of the ferocious judge, who, in spite of frequent threats that he would hang him, finally let him go at the price of £15,000. With all his faults, Jeffreys had one saving grace: a sense of humour that could find food even in a shambles. It comes into evidence here. For the judge returned his victim £240 by way of discount.

Edmund Prideaux was succeeded at Ford by his daughter Margaret, whose husband Francis Gwyn was a public servant of some distinction during six reigns, in the course of which he sat in Parliament for as many different constituencies. His official appointments were

manifold. Towards the end of Charles II.'s reign he was clerk of the Privy Council, an under-secretary of state and a groom of the bedchamber; under-secretary once more at the time of the revolution and secretary to Lord Rochester, both as Lord High Treasurer and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The diary which he kept on James II.'s march to the West at the end of 1688 has



FORD ABBEY—SHOWING THE MONK'S WALK.

been printed, but not that which records the subsequent deliberations of the Lords at the Guildhall. He was a commissioner of Public Accounts and a commissioner of the Board of Trade, and was dismissed as a Tory from the post of Secretary at War on the accession of George I. He did not die till twenty years later.

In the time of Francis Gwyn the famous Raphael tapestries came to Ford. Queen Anne, after whom a

room is still called, gave them to her Secretary at War. These tapestries, which consist of five pieces, representing New Testament scenes worked from the cartoons now at South Kensington, are supposed to have been made at the Arras looms for the King of Spain, and to have been found in a captured Spanish galleon. Some doubt as to the accuracy of this story exists, but the most important facts, the tapestries themselves, are genuine enough ; and there they are to this day, the glory of Ford.

The name of Gwyn, though the actual male descent failed, stayed at the Abbey for more than a century after the death of Francis. But within the last sixty years the house has changed hands several times. During the Gwyn tenure there occurred a very interesting interregnum of three years, from 1815 to 1818, when the lord was abroad and the tenant in possession was Jeremy Bentham.

Various stories are told of the first of the English utilitarians during his occupancy of Ford ; of how "he did nothing, dear old man, but write, write, write from day's end to week's end" and how he used to run up and down the walks, his arms akimbo ; hardly writing then one supposes. He had some distinguished visitors, some of whom have left their impressions of the philosopher and his habitation. Francis Horner, politician and political economist, wrote of him and the Abbey, "one spacious room in which, a tapestried

chamber, the utilitarian philosopher had utilised into what he calls his 'scribbling shop,'—two or three tables being set out, covered with white napkins, on which were placed music desks with manuscript, and here the visitors were allowed to be 'present at the mysteries,' for he went on as if we had not been with him."[1]

Sir Samuel Romilly also came and was surprised by the contrast between the splendour of the lodging and the austerity of the lodger. But perhaps the most significant, as well as the most renowned of Bentham's visitors, were his two disciples, the Mills, father and son, James and John Stuart.

With the utilitarians at ease in the ancient home of the monks I end the story of Ford Abbey. There is much to be said for the microcosmologists. An abbey, it seems, mirrors the progress of the world as well as the soul of man.

Of the building itself, how it was altered and how added to, some indications have from time to time been given in the foregoing narrative. Not much of the original house which sprang from the Lady Alice de Redvers' large generosity is now to be seen, but additions were being made within a century of her death, and these are more in evidence. The chapel, anciently the chapter house, which projects at right angles from

[1] Quoted in *The Book of the Axe.*

the east end of the south front, seems to be the oldest thing about the place. Norman ideas are obvious there. The Monks' Walk on the east side of the house is good work of the thirteenth century. It is of two storeys, the lower of which was a limb of the cloisters, the upper used for dormitories. The southern cloisters are later, being of Chard's time. They came in aptly afterwards as a conservatory for secular owners of Ford who cared for the tending of plants. Their windows are fine specimens of the dying Gothic, made the more interesting by arms of benefactors and the last abbot's devices.

Chard's also, of course, is the porch tower, large and elaborate, eternally typical of an European mood; the middle ages exuberant with the sudden joy of the Renaissance—a splendid moment, but of evil omen for churches. The mood was passed; the Renaissance had got from spring to autumn when Inigo Jones stuck his tactless porch in front of this fine structure. I like old Leland's comment on Abbot Chard. It is so very apt in its sonorous Latinity. "*Coenobium nunc sumptibus plane non credendis abbas magnificentissime restaurat.*" "The Abbot is at present restoring the convent in the most magnificent manner and at expenses which are evidently incredible."

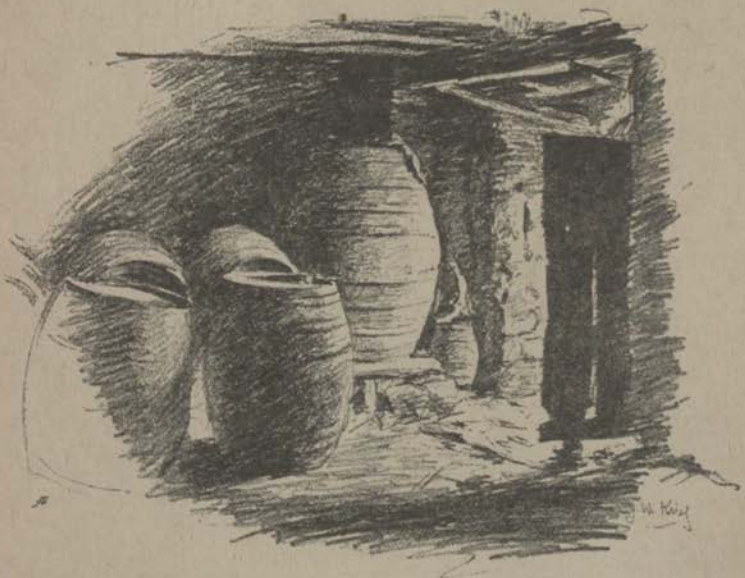
The stately range of transomed windows which stretch westward from the tower light the great hall, a splendid Tudor room with ceiling carved and gilded.

CIDER MAKING

Part of it has been a dining-room since Edmund Prideaux's time. Everywhere in the house are tapestries; Gobelin work in the state drawing-room; hangings, on which are represented the details of a Welsh wedding, in the apartment which loyal Francis Gwyn dedicated to Queen Anne; the famous Raphael tapestries (the reward of that loyalty) in the saloon above the porch. It is said that the great Catherine of Russia offered £30,000 for these pieces. But though she might annex half Poland she could not come by the Ford tapestries.

But shall I catalogue the wonders of the place? The huge kitchen, the breadth of the staircase with its balustrade so sumptuously wrought, the shadows and the sunlight in the park? Go there and see for yourself. For the lords of the house permit it.

Permit it, I hear a querulous repetition. *Is not the entrance to a house like this the right of the people?* It is a knavish voice that speaks thus, the voice that was raised so stridently when a certain nobleman asked the repayment of a generous loan, claimed the right to do what he would with his own. But let me not, at the eleventh hour, plunge into the turbid stream of sociological controversy.



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

ANYONE who has taken the trouble to read this book, not a long task nor, I hope, too dull for accomplishment, will have found in it things sacred and things profane, old and new, historic and romantic, thoughts gathered from this source and that. I do not wish on that account to claim any merit for the book itself. That must be judged by the presentation rather than by the mere presence of such things. But what I want to exclaim is, how wonderful our English countryside must be when a few square miles of it can yield such a store of memories and impressions. Surely this is matter for pride, and justification of the fine nationalism that finds voice in lines like these.

> Island-Kingdom, our island-state,
> Merry England, where fancy dwells
> In pageant, pilgrimage, high debate,
> And sprightly music of morris-bells;
> Tourneys for love and battles for hate;
> Torches, garlands, exultant bells—
> Challenging trumpets and festal bells;
> Wars of the Roses, land-locked strife,
> World-wide wars with France and Spain:
> The colour and pulse of that gallant life—
> Shall we never recover the mood again?

The poet answers his own question with a confident *Yes*. Why should he not be right?

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